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‘It would appear, from a very touching introduction by Sir John Coleridge, that Miss James is his “god-daughter,” and on that, were it on no other, ground he felt he could hardly refuse to “introduce” her book to the reading public : which accordingly he has done, in a wise, manly, and very instructive way, giving interest, and, indeed value, to Miss James’ own observations which follow. For, putting in the hand of any one at all likely to be led astray by Miss Phelps’s book, no handier antidote need be attempted than Miss James’s “Thoughts,” which are sound, and quite healthy, and woman like, and, we may add, of the very briefest. For that and many another purpose the little volume may be safely commended.’

WEEKLY REVIEW.

CHRISTIAN COUNSELS.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
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AND PARLIAMENT STREET

CHRISTIAN COUNSELS

SELECTED FROM the DEVOTIONAL WORKS

OF

FÉNELON, ARCHBISHOP OF CAMBRAI.

TRANSLATED BY

A. M. JAMES. W

'As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the
sons of God.'

Rom. viii. 14.

LONDON:
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PREFACE.



THE EDITION from which these translations have been made is that published by Firmin Didot Frères, Fils et Cie., Imprimeurs de l'Institut de France. The numbering of the different letters or articles is made consecutive, according to the order in which they have been chosen ; but the numbers of the original could not, of course, be retained.

Nothing has been added to the words of Fénelon, with the exception of an occasional quotation from the Bible, in order to make some passages more complete for the purposes of the selection. Most of the scriptural quotations, however, are Fénelon's own. Some passages, taken from other parts of his works, have been introduced amongst the rest.

The translator must be permitted to remark, for reasons that will no doubt become sufficiently obvious to the readers of these pages, that they are scarcely adapted for affording help to those who (to use Fénelon's own expression) 'are but learning to walk, and have not yet found the true road;' but are rather intended for those who are striving to '*run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*' To such as are thus looking unto Him, having found in Him the 'full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world,' many of the suggestions contained in the works of the greatest and holiest of Roman Catholic writers may, it is hoped, prove valuable. And to them this little work is dedicated.

A. M. J.

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CHRISTIAN COUNSELS.



I.

*CONCERNING THE RIGHT EMPLOYMENT OF TIME,
AND ON THE MEANS OF SANCTIFYING OUR
COMMONEST ACTIONS.*

I UNDERSTAND that what you wish to receive from me does not merely involve the laying down of certain general principles, in order to prove the importance of rightly using your time; of that truth you have, by the grace of God, long been persuaded. And it is a happiness to meet with those souls who have thus, as it were, already advanced half-way on their journey. But I do not wish to flatter you by these words, for much yet remains to be done. There is a wide difference between the fullest mental convictions, or even the most heartfelt desires, and true practical obedience.

Nothing has at all times been commoner, and

nothing is commoner at the present day, than to find Christians who are perfect and holy in theory. ‘*Ye shall know them by their fruits,*’¹ saith our Saviour. And this is the only rule which can never deceive us, if it be truly carried out ; by this alone may we judge.

There are sundry divisions of time which, in your life, may clearly be distinguished from one another ; but one maxim must be extended over all, namely, that none be left useless. All must be made to work together in the plan of your spiritual life. They each contain the different duties attached to them by God Himself, and of which He will demand account ; for, from the first moment of our existence to the last of our lives, God has left none vacant, none that we are at liberty to waste. The important matter therefore is to discover what it is that He means us to do. And this discovery may be made, not by an eager, restless zeal, which is far more likely to entangle us in all we attempt than to enlighten us respecting our duties ; but by a pure simplicity of

¹ St. Matt. vii. 16.

heart in seeking God, and by the earnest effort to overcome all the duplicities and false representations of self-love as soon as they are discovered. We are wonderfully ingenious in the art of self-seeking; and the same things which worldly minds will do without disguise, those who desire to serve God will often do in a more secret manner, and under some pretext which casts a veil over the deformity of their conduct.

The general rule for the right employment of our time is to accustom ourselves to live in immediate dependence on the Spirit of God; receiving each moment that help which it may please Him to bestow; consulting Him in those difficulties in which we have to make any prompt decision; referring to Him in all our weaknesses; calling upon Him and lifting up our thoughts to Him whenever our hearts, drawn aside by outward objects, are inclined to stray from our true road, and tend, in any degree, towards forgetfulness of God.

Happy is that Christian who, yielding himself up sincerely, rests ever in the hands of God, ready to do whatever He may please; and who never

wearies of saying, over and over again each day, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? *Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God.*'¹ Show me that Thou art my God by teaching me; and that I am Thine own, by enabling me to obey Thee. How can I be safe, O mighty God, but in Thy keeping? Apart from Thee, my soul is exposed to all the attacks of her enemies; I am ever in danger. I am all ignorance and weakness, I shall be lost if Thou leave me to myself. I should waste the precious time Thou hast allotted to me for my sanctification; I should wander, blindly, in my own ways. What could I do but choose amiss? what could I work in myself but the results of self-love, of sin, and of condemnation? '*Oh, send out Thy light and truth, that they may lead me.*'² Lord, give me Thy grace; give to me according to my necessity: even as children receive food in proportion to their age and requirements.

Hours of business, or of any outward occupation, only require, for their right use, a very simple

¹ Ps. cxliii. 10.

² Ps. xliii. 3.

attention to the orders of God's Providence. As He presents them before us, we have only to follow obediently, entirely submitting our own wills to Him—submitting to Him our delicacy, our restlessness, our self-love, our natural inclinations, our eagerness, our pleasures, or any other feeling that may arise, according to whether the matters in which we are concerned are agreeable or distressing. Only, whatever those occupations may be, we must not suffer ourselves to become immersed in them.

We should commence each undertaking with a simple view to God's glory, continue it without distraction, and finish it without impatience. *'Whatsoever we do, in word or deed, let us do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him. . . . For we serve the Lord Christ.'*¹

The time given to conversation and amusement is often the most dangerous to ourselves; though perhaps it is also the most useful for others. We must at such times be especially on our guard,

¹ Col. iii. 17-24.

that so we may be the more faithful, as in God's presence. The watchfulness enjoined by our Lord ; the aspirations of our hearts to Him ; the looking to Him as frequently as possible, in simple faith ; the quiet dependence on His grace as our only means of strength and safety ; all these must be used to preserve us from the poison that is so often concealed in the pleasures of conversation, and to enable us to introduce wisely such words as may help and edify others. Especially essential are such means for those who have much influence, and whose sayings may often be powerful for good or for evil.

Hours of leisure are usually the sweetest as also the most profitable to our own selves. And we certainly cannot turn them to better account than by devoting them to the renewal of our strength (even of our bodily strength), by the most secret and the closest communion with our Lord. Prayer is so valuable, it is the source of so much blessing, that he who has once truly found this treasure to be his own, cannot but turn to it at every opportunity.

II.

CONCERNING AMUSEMENTS: HOW WE MAY TAKE PART WITHOUT SCRUPLE IN SUCH AS ARE ATTACHED TO OUR POSITION, AND HOW THEY MAY BE SANCTIFIED BY PURITY OF INTENTION.

YOU need not, it appears to me, be at all perplexed on account of those entertainments in which you cannot avoid taking part. Some people consider it a portion of their religious duty to be miserable about everything, and believe that they should create in themselves a feeling of disgust at the very amusements which they are constrained to share. As for myself, I acknowledge that such harshness does not at all suit my views; I prefer a more simple line of conduct, and I believe also that it is more acceptable to God.

When amusements are in themselves innocent,

and when we are called upon to take our part in them in consequence of the station of life which Providence has assigned to us, it is only necessary that we should do so in moderation, and as in God's sight.

I have therefore come to the conclusion that when God has placed any one in a position such as He has allotted to you, the safest way is to accept it peaceably, without inward contention as to the secret motives which may almost imperceptibly creep into the heart. Those questionings become unending ; and instead of coming out of self to seek God, such frequent examinations of conscience actually cause one to be the more occupied with self.

Let us go forwards in all simplicity of heart, with peace and joy, 'which are the fruits of the Spirit.' He who recognises at all times the presence of God, even when engaged in the most trifling matters, will never cease to serve God, though He may seem to do nothing of serious importance. I take it for granted, of course, that what is done is done according to God's appoint-

ment, and that in all these matters every action is regulated by His commands.

The generality of people, when they desire to be converted, and wish to reform their lives, think far more of accomplishing certain difficult and unnecessary deeds than of purifying their intentions and denying their own wills in the ordinary duties of their life. In this they err greatly. It would be much better to make less change in their outward actions, and more change in the spirit in which those actions are performed. Provided one is already leading an honest and regular life, it is infinitely more important, in order to become truly a Christian, to alter that which is within than that which is without. *‘For by grace are we saved, through faith; and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.’*¹ And God does not demand the sound of our words, or the posture of our bodies, or external ceremonies; what He does demand is an undivided heart, a supple will; that is to say, a will that desires nothing and rejects nothing; wishing unreservedly

¹ Eph. ii. 8.

for all that He pleases, and desiring nothing at all, under any pretext, of that which does not please Him.

Bear within you this simplicity of heart, ever in union with the will of God, into every place whither His Providence may lead you. Seek God in those hours which have appeared to you so empty, and they will become full to you, for He will Himself sustain you in them. Even amusements, however useless in themselves, will become profitable, if you only enter upon them as that which is suitable, and in order to obey God therein. How free are our hearts when God leads us in this simple manner! We then go forwards like little children whom the mother is leading by the hand, and who are glad to be so led without knowing whither they go. We are willing to be at leisure, willing to speak, willing to be silent. When we may not speak of that which is edifying, we turn to lighter subjects, and thereby afford recreation both to others and to ourselves.

You will tell me, perhaps, that you would like better to be occupied with something more serious

or more important. But God does not like it better for you, since it is this that He has chosen, although it would not have been your own choice. His choice must needs be better than yours. No doubt you would derive more pleasure from the solid pursuits for which He has given you a taste. Nevertheless, it is just that pleasure which He sees fit to deny you ; although the taste is, in itself, good and wholesome. Even virtues must, in their exercise, be purified by the opposition from which God's providence causes them to suffer, that so they may be rendered free from self-will. How simple, how sweet, how loveable is that piety which rests solely on the foundation of God's will—'*By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of Jesus Christ.*'¹ Guided by Him, it may be that we live much as others live, without affectation, without austerity, leading a life of liberty ; yet it will also be with a constant subjection to every duty, with unremitting surrender of all that does not agree with God's order for ourselves, looking ever towards Him in all purity of heart, sacri-

¹ Heb. x. 10.

ficing to Him every perversity of our nature. Here is the adoration which Jesus Christ and the Father accept. All else is mere ceremony, the shadow of Christianity rather than its reality.

You will, doubtless, ask by what means it can be possible in a life such as yours to preserve this purity of will. It is no easy matter, you will say, to protect one's heart from the bad influences of worldly society. If against oneself, even, watch must constantly be maintained, how can we expect to maintain that watchfulness if one is also thus constantly exposed to the dangers of the world, and to the amusements which must increase those difficulties which at all times surround the Christian soul?

I acknowledge the danger. I even think it greater than I can express. I fully agree to the necessity of taking every precaution; and I would advise you to adopt the following means:—

In the first place, I would have you lay a foundation of prayer, and of reading. Read, not in order that you may learn to know more, but in order that you may learn to distrust yourself; then

all will turn to your profit. But read prayerfully ; and often meditate in stillness of heart on some great truth of religion. This you will best do by taking some action, or some word, of our Saviour's, and fixing your thoughts upon it. When you feel convinced of the truth on which you have thus pondered, apply it closely and seriously to the correction of your own failings ; asking God to enable you to perform that which He gives you grace to resolve. When you find your mind wander during this meditation, bring it back quietly, without discouragement, and without being disturbed in spirit, even by the most obstinate distractions. So long as they are involuntary they can have no power to injure you ; on the contrary, they will often help you more than those exercises which bring you perceptible consolation ; for they will humble you, they will mortify your nature, they will teach you to seek God for His own sake, and not for the sake of the consolations He bestows.

If you reserve, faithfully, morning and evening, time for carrying out these devotions, you will find that they will act as an antidote to the poison

which surrounds you. I say evening as well as morning, because it is as necessary to have frequent recourse to the means of supplying nourishment to the soul, as it is to sustain the body ; else it will be weakened and exhausted by constant intercourse with the world.

‘Give us, day by day, our daily bread.’ And what is our daily bread ? Is it not the support which God’s providence bestows upon us for the necessities of life ? Most especially, therefore, is it that bread which nourishes the soul unto life eternal. It is hunger which makes us desire our food, and which causes it to be profitable to us. Why do we not hunger and thirst after righteousness ? Why do not our souls hunger and thirst even as our bodies ? Let us come before God as the poor who beg, and who entreat for a morsel of bread ; let us feel our weakness, and our faintness for food. Let us read, let us pray, with this earnest longing to satisfy the thirst of our souls with the living water, which springeth up into everlasting life. Be then firm with yourself, as well as with others, in always reserving the necessary hours for devotion. Never

suffer yourself to be so led away by external interests, however good they may be in themselves, as to lack time for nourishing your inward life. . . . It is at the feet of Jesus that we can secretly heal the wounds of our hearts, and that the stains we have received from our intercourse with the world are washed away.

Lastly, I would certainly have you limit yourself to those entertainments which are not unsuitable to the religious profession which you make, and to the example which you should set to others. For even the world, worldly as it is, demands from people who despise it, that they should be consistent in their contempt; and will always respect those who despise it honestly. True Christians may rejoice that the world is so severe a critic; they may rejoice that they are thus the more urgently compelled to do only that which tends to edification.

I consider also that you should only join in those amusements at which your presence is really required, or in order to please others; and that you should never attempt, indirectly, to bring about

such invitation. Thus you will gain the more time for your domestic duties, and for your religious occupations.

I feel convinced that, if you follow out these simple rules, you will reap an abundant blessing. God will lead you as it were by the hand, and will support you. The delight of His presence will be sweeter than any pleasures which can be offered. You will be moderate in all, your watchfulness and your devotion will be without constraint, without affectation, and without harshness to others. You will be in the midst of these things as though they were not, and, in cheerfulness and gladness of heart, will be '*all things to all men.*'

When you find that your heart becomes weary, that your joy passes away, return quietly and without distress to the bosom of your Heavenly Father, whose arms are unceasingly stretched out towards you. There will you find happiness and freedom, even in the midst of trouble, and you shall see that He will suffer you to lack nothing.

One confiding look, the simplest yearning of your heart towards Him, will refresh you; and,

though you may at times feel weak and discouraged, yet, so soon as God sets anything before you to do, He will give power and courage to perform it, even according to your need. For our Father, so far from forsaking us, does but seek so to open our hearts that He may pour into them the abundance of His grace.

III.

HOW WE SHOULD REGARD OUR OWN SINFULNESS WITHOUT GIVING WAY TO DISCOURAGEMENT—HOW TO MAINTAIN WATCHFULNESS, AND HOW TO MEET TEMPTATION.

YOU can easily understand that many sins may be wilful to a certain extent, although we may not have committed them with the deliberate intention of failing in our duty towards God. One friend will often reproach another for some offence, by which that friend nevertheless has not intended to annoy him ; but which he has permitted himself to do, knowing that it was likely to vex him. So also does God reproach us for similar faults. They may not have been intentional, for they were committed thoughtlessly ; nevertheless, we have fallen into them by our own free will, and in spite of certain inward warnings which ought to have sufficed at any rate to make us pause and con-

sider. Into such faults as these many religious people suffer themselves to be led.

As to such sins as are deliberately wilful, it seems strange indeed that any should fall into them who have once truly devoted themselves to God's service. Even little faults become serious and hateful in our eyes, in proportion as the light of God shines within us ; just as the sun, when it rises, gradually reveals to us the true shape of those objects which we could discern but indistinctly during the night. It is therefore no wonder that, as your inward light grows clearer, the imperfections in yourself, which you had hitherto perceived dimly, should be revealed to you in their full strength and malignity ; or that evils should appear whose very existence in your heart you had never even suspected. You will find there such weakness as will teach you to lean no longer on your own strength ; but that experience, instead of discouraging you, will only act as a most useful humiliation. There is no truer sign of our progress than the being able to bear the sight of our infirmities without trouble or discourage-

ment. And *'we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'*¹

As regards the way in which we can best maintain the necessary watchfulness without becoming self-conscious, the following appears to me the most practical. A wise traveller, pressing forwards on his journey, is careful of his footsteps, and keeps his eyes open on the road that lies before him; but he is not constantly turning back to look at the steps he has already taken, or to examine their traces. Thus also should the soul whom God is really leading by the hand (for I am not speaking of those who are but learning to walk, and have not yet found the true road), keep watch over her way, but with a simple and tranquil watchfulness, looking only at the path which lies immediately before her, and without being disturbed by thoughts of self. It is a constant attention to God's will that enables us to perform it from hour to hour; not self-contemplation, or the

¹ Heb. iv. 15.

frequent examination of our own state, which often, indeed, it pleases God to conceal from us. Thus says the Psalmist, '*Mine eyes are ever looking unto the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.*'¹

Observe that, in order to walk along the road which is full of snares, he does not look downwards to examine his own steps, but lifts up his eyes unto the Lord. We never keep so true a watch over our ways as when we walk as in God's presence, as He commanded Abraham to do. For what is the object of our vigilance but to follow the will of our Lord, step by step? Whoso is conformed to that will, watches truly, and is sanctified in all that he does. If we never lost the sense of God's presence, we should never relax our watch over ourselves, but it would be a simple, loving, unselfish, quiet watchfulness; whereas that watchfulness which seeks reassurance concerning our own ways is sharp, restless, and full of self-interest. It is not by our own light that we are bidden to walk, but by the light of God. And it

¹ Ps. xxv. 15.

is impossible for us to look upon His holiness without dreading the slightest sin. We cannot but examine our consciences from time to time, as in the presence of God ; we feel our need of doing so in order to make sure that we are not relaxing in our efforts. But such examinations become more and more simple, easy, and free from self-contemplation ; since we thus examine ourselves, not for our own interests, but in order that we may be more and more truly conformed to the will of God. As to all else, we leave ourselves in His hands ; and feel as thankful to be there as we should feel grieved to be in our own. We wish to know nothing that He has hidden from us. Loving Him far more than we love ourselves, we yield ourselves unconditionally to His good pleasure ; we care only to love Him, and to forget self. He who thus loses his life shall find it for all eternity.

With regard to temptation, I know but of two rules. One is to be faithful to the inward light bestowed upon us in giving up, without reserve and without delay, all that we are at liberty to

give up, which may increase or reawaken the temptation. I say all that we are at liberty to give up, for it does not always depend on ourselves to do so. The occasions of temptation which are necessarily connected with the state in which Providence has placed us, are not in our own power.

The second rule is, to turn at once to God in the temptation, without vexation, without stopping to inquire whether we had, in any degree, begun to yield, suffering no questions whatever to interrupt our immediate return to God. We run the risk of falling back into the temptation if we stay to examine too closely as to whether or no we have failed. The shortest way, and the safest, is to act as a little child at the breast. If he is shown some horrible monster, he does but turn away, and hide himself in his mother's bosom.

The realising of God's presence is the one sovereign remedy; it is that which sustains us, consoles, and calms us. In this world we must needs be proved by temptation. Our crosses tempt us by irritating our pride, prosperity by

flattering it. Our life is one continual conflict; but it is a conflict in which Jesus Christ fights with us. '*For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.*'¹ Then let temptation rage around us, only let us not cease to travel onwards; even as the traveller, surprised by a violent wind whilst traversing an open plain, will wrap himself the more tightly in his cloak, and will press onwards, in spite of tempestuous weather.

Be satisfied that, in order to accomplish all that God would have done, there is, in one sense, but very little to do. True, there is a great deal to be done in another sense, since nothing must be withheld from Him. We may not, for one moment, resist the jealousy of His love, which pursues, to the very innermost recesses of our hearts, the least self-love, and every affection which is untrue to its Giver. But, on the other hand, it is not by the multiplicity of our theories, or by our own austerities, neither is it by constraint or by painful effort that we make real progress. On the

¹ Heb. ii. 18.

contrary, it is simply a question of yielding up our will ; of going cheerfully from day to day whithersoever God may lead us ; seeking nothing, discouraged by nothing ; satisfied with the present moment ; thankful to let Him do all who has made all, and to leave our own will immoveable within His will. How happy is it to abide in this condition ! How satisfied is the heart, even though it may lack all else !

I pray that our Lord may make known to you all the infinite depths of His love, that you may lose yourself therein ; and that your heart may be made for ever one with Him.

IV.

ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

THE great mainspring of our perfection is contained in the words which God spake of old to Abraham, ‘*Walk before me, and be thou perfect.*’¹ The presence of God calms the mind, and gives quiet and repose even during the day, in the midst of our business; but then we must be unreservedly His own. When we have truly found God, we have nothing more to seek for amongst men; the best friend is within our hearts; He is the Heavenly Bridegroom; and, in jealousy, He puts all other love at a distance.

We do not need much time for loving God. To refresh ourselves with His presence, to lift up our thoughts to Him, to adore Him from the very depth of our heart, to offer to Him all that we have,

¹ Gen. xvii. 1.

and all that we suffer—this is the true *kingdom of God within us*, which nothing can destroy.

When external distractions, or the strength of our own natural feelings, hinder us from being able to collect our thoughts in quietness of heart, we can at least calm ourselves by the desire of our will. The very yearning for such devotion becomes in itself a kind of devotion, as we turn towards God, to do with good-will whatsoever He may please. It is well to re-awaken in our hearts, from time to time, the desire of belonging wholly to God ; of belonging to Him with all the powers of the soul, with every capacity of the mind for knowing and thinking of Him, and with all the power of the will to love Him. We should also desire that all the external senses of our nature be in every way consecrated to Him. Let us '*therefore present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.*' And let us not '*be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*'¹

¹ Romans xii. 1, 2.

We should take care not to be voluntarily occupied for too long at a time, either internally or externally, with such things as cause distraction to the heart and mind ; that is to say, with the things which make such demands on either the one or the other as to cause us difficulty in so retiring within ourselves as to realise the presence of God.

As soon as we find that any object gives us joy and delight, let us prevent our heart from resting thereon, by reminding it of our only true and sovereign good, even God Himself. In proportion as we thus deal faithfully, by so detaching ourselves from earthly affections as to prevent them from entering into the depths of our soul, which our Lord has reserved for Himself, to dwell there, and therein to be adored and loved, we shall soon taste that purity of joy which He never fails to bestow on the heart that is thus free to receive it.

It is well not to take too eager a part in what is said or done around us, or to let our thoughts be too much filled by such things, for they become a source of much distraction. As soon as we have perceived what it is that God requires of ourselves,

in each matter presented before us, let us make that our limit, and separate ourselves from the rest. Thus shall we keep the depths of our soul free and untroubled, and shall avoid many things which would but prove a matter of embarrassment to us, and would keep our hearts from turning readily to God.

An excellent means of remaining in quietness and freedom of spirit is, at the close of each undertaking, to bring all our reflections about it to an end also ; dropping all recurrences to self, whether they arise from satisfaction or from regret, for they are always harmful to us. Happy is he who retains in his mind nothing that is useless, who thinks of each thing only when the right time comes for attending to it ; so that it is, in fact, God who arouses the impressions by showing him what He would have him do, rather than that his own mind makes the effort of seeking them out, or of anticipating them.

Again, let us often accustom ourselves, during the day, and in the course of our occupations, to collect our thoughts by simply looking towards God. Thus let us quiet every disturbance of our

hearts, every agitation that arises within us. Let us also withdraw ourselves from every pleasure which does not come from God. Let us silence all idle thoughts and all day-dreams. Let us speak no empty words. Let us seek for God within our hearts, and we shall assuredly find Him, and with Him joy and peace.

In all our employments let us be more occupied with God than with all besides. In order that we may perform our business well, let us do it as in His presence, and as for Him. At the thought of God our hearts will be calm and still. A word from our Saviour once quieted the raging of the sea: and one look from Him, one yearning of our hearts towards Him, will daily work the same blessed calm in us.

Let the heart be often lifted to God, then will He purify, enlighten, and guide it. Such was the daily aim of the prophet David, who said, '*I have set the Lord always before me.*'¹ And let us often repeat the beautiful words, '*Whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth*

¹ Ps. xvi. 8.

*that I desire in comparison of Thee. God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'*¹

There is no need to wait for a time of leisure, in order that we may shut our door and be alone ; the moment in which we long for devotion may be also the moment in which we practise it. We have but to turn towards God within our hearts, in simple, loving confidence. Even times that are full of interruptions may thus be used ; when we are eating, for instance, or conversing with others. Hours which would otherwise be full of weariness will thus become times of refreshment ; and all things will work together for good to those who love God.

It is desirable to read often, in proportion to our tastes and necessities ; but let such reading be frequently laid aside in order to give place to the innermost devotion of the heart. A few simple words, if enriched by God's Spirit, will be to us as hidden manna. The words may be forgotten, but they will work secretly, and the soul will be nourished and strengthened by them.

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 25.

V

ON THE LOVE OF GOD, AND ON FAITHFULNESS
IN LITTLE THINGS.¹

ALL men must acknowledge the duty of loving God ; but they need to consider how they ought to love Him. We should love Him because He is our Creator, and because all that we have is freely given to us by Him. But not only is all that we have given to us by Him ; all that surrounds us is also of Him. Yet more should we love Him, because He hath first loved us, and loved us with a tender love, as a father pitieth his children ; for ‘ *He knoweth whereof we are made ; He remembereth that we are dust.*’ He has sought us in our ways ; He has followed us as the shepherd follows after his wandering sheep. And not only has

¹ The first part of this article, as far as the words, St. Francis de Sales, &c., is to be found only in the edition from which this translation is taken.

He thus sought for us, but, having found us, He has carried us in His arms. He has borne our griefs, taking upon Him our human nature. '*He hath been obedient unto death, even the death of the cross ;*'¹ and the measure of that obedience is the measure of His love for us.

Having thus convinced ourselves that we ought to love God, let us consider how we shall love Him. Shall it be with the love of cowards, who would fain divide their hearts, giving a portion to God, but keeping the rest for the world and its pleasures ; who strive to join together truth and falsehood, God and Mammon ; who would serve God in church, and give the rest of their time to the world, so that God shall have that which is superficial, and the world shall have the reality of their affections ? But God will have none of such love ; He will not suffer a divided heart ; the whole is not too much for Him. It is thus that He told us how He will be loved—'*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.*'² Can

¹ Phil. ii. 8.

² St. Mark xii. 30

we think after this that He will accept an empty homage? Except we bring all to Him, he will have nothing.

And, in truth, is it not ingratitude to refuse our love to Him who has loved us from all eternity?—nay, more, who has loved us even in the very depths of our iniquity? *‘For God commendeth His love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.’*¹ The world itself, corrupt as it is, prides itself in looking with horror on ingratitude. It will not suffer that a son should be ungrateful to the father to whom he owes his existence. Yet what life is it that we owe to an earthly father? A life full of misery and bitterness—a life which ever tends towards death—which is in itself a continual death. Nevertheless, it is an established law that we should feel all imaginable respect for our fathers and mothers. What then, on the same principle, should we render to our God? The life which He gives shall endure even as He endureth. He has created us in order to bestow perfect happiness upon us: He

¹ Romans v. 8.

is more truly our Father than all fathers put together. He has loved us with an everlasting love. And what has He found in us to draw forth such love? Nothing, when we were not; sin, so soon as we existed. Oh, what surpassing love! And is it yet possible that we should withhold our love from Him who hath thus dealt with us?

But it is so difficult, you say, to love God only, to give up all other supports. Is it then so sweet to be divided between God and the world—to be drawn by your passions, and at the same time torn by the reproaches of conscience—to taste of no pleasure without bitterness, and of no joy without decay? It is by this unjust division, though in truth it causes you the keenest suffering, that you strive to soften the harshness which the cowardice of your nature makes you fear to meet with in Divine love. But I repeat that there cannot be a grosser delusion; for, if there be any who are happy, even now in this life, it is those who love God. If our self-interest could avail us for any good purpose, it would lead us to give up all else, that we might be His alone. So soon as the love

of God reigns supreme in any soul, there dwells also true peace. Neither greatness, nor riches, nor honour, nor any other temporal good is needed. That soul desires nothing but the will of her Beloved; it suffices her that His will is being fulfilled; she ever watches in longing expectation for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom. Herein is Christian perfection; it exists not in elaborate understanding. How have the learned gone astray in the knowledge of God! for '*knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth.*'¹

Neither is there virtue in the length of our prayers, since Jesus Christ himself said, '*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. . . . I will profess unto them, I never knew you.*'² Neither does devotion consist in works without love. We cannot love God without doing such works, because charity is never idle. When love dwells within us, it must necessarily lead us to work for God; and if, through any infirmity, we are unable to do active work in His service, we can please Him as truly in our suffering.

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 1.

² St. Matt. vii. 21-23.

Nor is this all. Having learnt to love God with an undivided love, let us rise yet higher, and love Him for His own sake, not for our own interest. And is He not abundantly worthy of such love? If any being deserves to be thus loved, is it not He who is infinitely loveable?

Saint François de Sales says that the difference between great virtues and faithfulness in little things is like the difference between salt and sugar. Sugar has a more delicious taste, but it is not so frequently useful. Salt, on the contrary, is employed in all our most necessary food. Great virtues are rare; the opportunities for exercising them occur but seldom. When they present themselves we have been prepared beforehand, and we are excited by the very sacrifices we are making; we are sustained either by the brilliance of our actions in the eyes of others, or by our own satisfaction in making so unusual an effort. But the opportunities for little sacrifices are unforeseen; they occur hourly; they constantly oblige us to struggle with our pride, with our indolence, with our hastiness or our discontent. If we would be truly faith-

ful, nature can have no breathing time; she must die to all her own desires. People would far rather offer to God certain great sacrifices, however painful, provided they might still, in all lesser matters, follow their own tastes and inclinations. Nevertheless, it is by faithfulness in little things that the spirit of love and holiness is proved, and by which it can be distinguished from mere natural impulses. It is with religion as in worldly affairs; more men ruin themselves through extravagance in little matters than by great expenses; and whosoever, either in temporal or in spiritual things, knows how to turn every detail into profit, will never fail in heaping up wealth. He who wastes nothing soon grows rich. Besides, remember that what God cares to see in our actions is the spirit of love which prompts them, and the suppleness of our will. Men can scarcely judge our deeds except from without; but God counts as nothing that which is most brilliant in the eyes of men. What He would have in us is purity of intention, an ever-ready yielding of our will; and these are more safely, and at the same time more truly, proved in

common than in extraordinary matters. Sometimes we care more for a trifle than for some object of importance; and there may be more difficulty in giving up an amusement than in bestowing a large sum in charity.

We deceive ourselves the more easily about little things because we imagine them to be so harmless, and because we fancy that we do not really care for them. Nevertheless, when God takes them away from us, we find by the pain of the privation how much and how inexcusably we had become attached to them. Moreover, if we neglect trifles, we cause offence to the members of our own families, to our servants, and to the public. How are men to believe that our piety is true, if our conduct in the details they can perceive is cowardly and inconsistent? How are they to suppose that we should be ready to make any great sacrifice, if they see us fail so soon as we are called upon to make smaller ones?

But, after all, the most dangerous evil is that, by negligence in little things, we acquire the habit

of unfaithfulness. We grieve the Holy Spirit, and reckon it a slight matter to displease God.

True love, on the contrary, considers nothing unimportant; because, whatever is capable of pleasing or displeasing God must always appear great to it. Not that true love causes constraint, or scrupulousness, but that its faithfulness knows no limits. Acting towards God in all simplicity, it troubles not itself with that which He does not require; but neither does it hesitate for a moment at anything which He does require. It is not by constraint that we become faithful in that which is least; it is by the spirit of love, which is free from the disquiet of a troubled or scrupulous mind. The heart, being drawn by the love of God, takes delight in performing all that He would have done, but will have nothing to do with what He does not appoint. The more God leads us into the most absolute obedience to Himself, the more truly free do we become—the deeper peace do we enjoy.

Those people who are naturally careless about trifles should make a point of being the more faithful concerning them. They are tempted to

despise them ; they are in the habit of counting them as nothing ; they do not regard their consequences, or consider the evils that may gradually arise. Even their own most painful experiences in this respect are forgotten. We prefer making great resolutions of imaginary firmness, and relying on that courage which has so often deceived us, rather than submit ourselves to constant obedience. It is a trifle, you say. True, it is a trifle in your eyes, because it is all for yourself ; but it is a trifle which you love well enough to refuse it to God. There is no greatness of mind in despising little things ; on the contrary, it is only the narrowness of our views which makes us consider that to be small which has such great results.

Do not fear this constant attention to little things. It will require courage at first, but it will become your peace and safety. Without it there is nothing but trouble and constant backsliding. But God will lead you step by step into that happy and peaceful state in which true love is ever watchful, without constraint, and without weariness of heart.

VI.

*ON COWARDLY HESITATIONS IN
SERVING GOD.*

THOSE who have lived apart from God consider themselves very near to Him so soon as they have taken a few steps towards Him. They leave off some gross sins ; they begin to lead a less worldly and dissipated life ; and then they compare themselves, not by the Gospel, which is our only true standard, but by the life they were leading before, and which they see many others still leading. They require nothing more in order to consider themselves saints ; and they close their eyes to the possibility of anything further remaining to be done.

Yet this state is perhaps even more dangerous than one of open sinfulness. In an unruly life the conscience may be aroused, faith may be awakened,

need may be perceived of making some great effort ; whilst a partial change lulls the reproaches of conscience, and establishes a false security ; thus preventing the evil from being cured by persuading the heart that there is nothing amiss.

But it is not only necessary that we should cease to do evil, it is also essential that we should learn to do well. The kingdom of heaven is far too great a prize to be bestowed on slavish fear, which only refrains from that evil on which it dares not to venture. God desires to have children who love His goodness, not slaves who serve Him from fear of His power. We should so love Him as to do all that true love must teach us to do. Can we truly love God, and love also his enemy, the world, on which He has pronounced His curse ? Can we love God, and fear to know Him too well, or to do too much in His service ? Can we love God, and be satisfied with not rousing His anger, taking no trouble to please Him, neither caring to glorify Him nor having even the courage to show our love ? Jesus Christ hath said, *‘Every branch in me that beareth not fruit shall be taken away*

*and cast into the fire.'*¹ He who beareth none of the fruits of Divine love is dead and withered down to the very root.

Does there exist on earth a creature so vile as to be content with such love as many are not ashamed to bring to God? We will love Him, provided we need only give Him words and ceremonies; moreover, they must be very short ceremonies, for we soon become wearied. But we would sacrifice no strong passion for his sake, no real interest, none of the luxuries of an easy life. We would love Him on condition that we need diminish nothing of our blind self-love, our self-idolatry. Instead of bringing ourselves to God, as the One for whom we were made, we desire to bring Him down to our level. We would seek Him only by way of make-shift, just in order that He may help and console us when all creatures shall fail. Is this loving God? is it not rather angering Him?

Nor is this all. We are willing to love God, provided we may be ashamed of our love, and hide it as a weakness, that we may blush for Him as

¹ St. John xv. 2-6.

for a friend who is unworthy of our affection. We would pay to Him some outward semblance of religion, sufficient to avoid scandal or actual impiety, yet live according to the dictates of the world, daring to give nothing to God without its permission. And such is the love for which many expect to receive an everlasting reward !

Those who act thus know neither God nor themselves. They are jealous of their own freedom ; they fear to bind themselves too much to the demands of religion. But they forget that they are not their own. We have not even, strictly speaking, any right to give ourselves to God, seeing that we have no rights over ourselves. It is rather that if we do not surrender ourselves entirely to Him, as being essentially and only His, we are guilty of sacrilege, we violate the very law of creation. God knows, far better than we do, that which is best for us. If we had written the Gospel perhaps we should have softened its commands to suit our cowardly natures ; but God did not consult us on that point. He has given it to us as it is, and He has said, '*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but*

my word shall not pass away':¹ we may not diminish '*one jot or tittle.*' '*Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat,*'² yet cursed is he who shall strive to widen the narrow way! Let the pride of man be silenced; he may imagine himself to be free, but he is not free.

Yet He who hath this absolute sovereignty over us, is ready to give, by His own grace, the power to will and to do all that He commands. He teaches us to love His yoke, He softens it by all the charms of holiness and truth. '*My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*' Let not the name of yoke alarm us. We bear it, but Christ bears it with us. A yoke is that which must be borne by two; and it is His yoke, not our own. 'O man of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?' Let God do what He pleases with thee; yield thyself to Him. It may be thou wilt suffer, but it will be for love's sake, in peace, and with full consolation. Thou wilt have need to fight, but thou shalt be victorious; for God Himself will fight with thee,

¹ St. Matt. xxiv. 35.

² St. Mark vii. 13.

and He will give thee '*a crown of glory which fadeth not away.*' Thou mayst weep; but thy tears will be sweet, for God Himself will come unto thee, and will wipe them from thine eyes. Thou wilt no longer be at liberty to follow thine own evil ways; but thou wilt freely sacrifice such liberty, and wilt enter thereby into that truer liberty which the world knoweth not, and in which all is love.

What blindness, then, to be afraid of going too far in the service of God! Let us lose ourselves in His love; the more deeply we love Him, the more we shall love all that He causes us to do. His love softens every cross, draws us from all that is hateful, keeps us from many a secret poison, leads us, in loving tenderness, through every trouble, and reveals to us, even in the hour of death, an entrance into eternal glory and blessedness. The love of God changes every evil into good; how can we fear to be too full of it? Do we fear to be too happy, too free from self, from the caprices of passion, or from the tyranny of the world? Wherefore do we not cast ourselves in

fullest confidence into the arms of that merciful Father, the God of all consolation? He loves us, how can we choose but to love Him? His love, ever growing within us, will satisfy us, though all else be lacking. He alone can fill our hearts. The world may intoxicate, trouble, agitate them, but can never satisfy. God will take from us nothing but that which would render us miserable. He will teach us to do all in Him, and thereby to do all aright. And everything, even the smallest actions of our lives, shall work together for endless good. In peace shall we meet the approach of death, for to us it will become the entrance into everlasting life. *'Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up in life.'*¹

*'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.'*² What comparison can there be between the things of this world and the joys of heaven? The early Christians rejoiced unceasingly in the hopes

¹ 2 Cor. v. 4.

² 1 Cor. ii. 9.

set before them. Persecutions, tortures, the most cruel deaths—nothing could discourage them ; for they knew that all these things would be abundantly repaid by the ‘ *far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*’ They rejoiced when they were counted worthy of ‘ *being partakers of Christ’s sufferings.*’ But we, cowardly souls, we know not how to suffer, because we know not how to hope ; we are overpowered by the lightest trials, we can scarcely bear even those which arise to us through our own pride and luxury.

‘ *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*’¹ But we must sow if we would reap. This life is the time for sowing ; in the world to come we shall receive the fruit of our labours. But mean, impatient man would fain reap before he has sown. We desire the consolations of God, and therefore we wish that He should prepare a smooth and easy way for us to approach Him. We would willingly offer to Him—*of that which costs us nothing.* To receive much, and to give little—it is to this self-love always aspires. Blind that

¹ Ps. cxxvi. 5.

we are! shall we never believe that the '*kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and that the violent take it by force.*'¹ It is the souls who can bear to do violence to themselves, and who '*fight the good fight of faith,*' that are judged worthy of '*the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.*' Woe unto those who receive their portion in this world! for the day will come in which all their false joy shall be brought to confusion. Then will the world weep and lament; but '*God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.*'²

¹ St. Matt. xi. 12.

² Rev. xxi. 4.

VII.

ON THE IMITATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

WE must imitate Jesus. That means that we should live as He lived, think as He thought, be conformed to His likeness.

What a contrast! We who are nothing would become great; the All-Powerful makes Himself '*of no reputation.*' I would forsake all with Thee, O Lord! I sacrifice to Thee all my pride, all the vanity which has hitherto possessed my heart. Fulfil this my desire; keep me from failing in it; '*turn away mine eyes lest they behold vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way.*'¹ Enable me to behold Thee alone, and to see myself as in Thy presence; then shall I know what I am, and what Thou art.

¹ Ps. cxix. 37.

Jesus Christ was born in a stable ; He was compelled to flee into Egypt ; He passed thirty years of his life in the workshop of a carpenter ; He suffered from hunger, from thirst, from weariness. He was despised and rejected. He taught the doctrine of Heaven, and none would listen. The wise and great men of this world turned against Him, they took Him captive, cruelly tormented Him, treated Him as a slave, crucified Him between two thieves, having first preferred a robber to Him. Such was the life which Jesus Christ chose ; and we—we dread the slightest humiliation ; the least contempt is insupportable to us !

Let us compare our lives with that of Jesus Christ ; remembering that He is the Master, we the servants ; that He is all-powerful, we are all weakness ; that He abases Himself, and that we would be exalted. Let us think upon our corruption till we have no contempt but for ourselves. Who are we, that we should despise others and blame their faults, when we ourselves are full of evil ? Let us begin to walk in the path which

Jesus Christ has traced out for us, since it is by that path alone that we can follow Him.

How can we follow Jesus, if we will not do so in the conditions of His human life—in poverty and in suffering, through shame and persecutions, by the cross and by humiliations? Saints have found Him in Heaven, amid the splendours of His glory, and in joy unspeakable; but it is after they have dwelt with Him on earth, in contempt, in suffering, and in humiliation. To be Christians is to be followers of Christ; and in what can we follow Him if we refuse to do so in His humiliations! Nothing else can bring us really close to Him. As almighty we may adore Him; as just we may fear Him; as holy and merciful let us love Him with all our strength; but as humble, submissive, despised, let us imitate Him.

It must not be supposed that we can do this of ourselves; all that is within us resists the endeavour; let us seek for support from God. Jesus Christ has been willing to take upon Himself all our weakness. '*He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities.*'¹

¹ Isa. liii. 5.

He is the High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and '*in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.*'¹ Let us therefore draw all our strength from Him, who, of His own will, became weak in order that we might be made strong. Let us become rich through his poverty; and let us say boldly: '*I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.*'²

I would follow, O Jesus, the path which Thou didst take; I would imitate Thee; but I am unable, except by thy grace. O despised and humble Saviour, give me that which is needed by all true Christians! give me such contempt for myself that I may learn that lesson which is beyond human understanding, even the lesson of dying to self by true mortification and humility.

¹ Heb. ii. 18.

² Phil. iv. 13.

VIII.

ON HUMILITY.

ALL holy men have agreed that true humility is the foundation of every other virtue. Humility is the offspring of pure love; humility is, in itself, truth. There are but two great truths—that of the all-sufficiency of God, and that of the emptiness of the creature. In order therefore that humility should be real, it must cause us to render unceasing homage to God, and to remain in our only true position towards Him, satisfied with being nothing. Christ calls upon us to be meek and lowly in heart; gentleness is the offspring of humility, just as anger is the offspring of pride. There is none beside Christ who can give us this meekness of heart, which comes from Him alone.

‘ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself

*of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant.'*¹ What hath He not done for love of us? What hath He not suffered for us? '*He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened He not His mouth.'*² Yet we—we complain of the lightest suffering; we are so vain, so delicate, so sensitive!

There is no true gentleness apart from humility. So long as we are full of self, we are shocked at the faults of others. Let us be fully persuaded that nothing is due to ourselves, and then nothing will irritate us. Let us think often of our own sins, and we shall be lenient to the sins of others. From every page of the Gospel (as St. Augustine says) again and again echo the sweet words of Christ, '*Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.*'

Humility does not consist, as we are apt to imagine, in external acts of lowliness, but in keeping in our own true position. He who esteems himself as worth anything, is not truly humble, neither he who seeks anything for his own sake;

¹ Phil. ii. 7.

² Isa. liii. 7.

but he only who forgets himself so fully as to think of himself no longer, who is hurt by nothing, who can speak of himself as he would speak of another person ; he who will work for love's sake without pausing to consider whether he does so from humility or from pride, but is even quite willing to be thought lacking in humility—in fact, he who is full of true charity—is truly humble. He who seeks not his own interest, but that of God alone for time and for eternity, that man is humble ; the more pure his love becomes, the more perfect becomes his humility. Let us not, therefore, measure humility by any outward acts whatever, but only by pure charity. Love strips us of ourselves, and clothes us in Jesus Christ. In this does true humility consist, that we should '*live no longer to ourselves, but that Christ should live in us.*'

Many deceive themselves in this respect. Striving to be humble through their own will, and lacking self-renunciation, they offend against charity. If they had sufficient light to perceive the truth, they would see clearly that they are exalting, not

humbling themselves, by the acts of humility which they practise. He who is truly humble suffers himself to be led unresistingly. He believes that God can make what He pleases of Him, as He might out of the merest nothing. There is far more real humility in thus giving oneself up to do whatever God may please, than in opposing His designs under the pretext of being unworthy. He who prefers a low position to a higher one by his own choice, is not truly humble, though he may desire to be so.

It is false humility to believe oneself unfit for the mercies of God, and therefore not to expect them. True humility consists in seeing all our unworthiness, and yet yielding ourselves up to God, nothing doubting that He can do great things in us. If God, in order to work in us, required to find the foundations already laid, we might well fear that our sins have so ruined all that we could never be made worthy of Divine favour. But God requires to find nothing in us; it would be impossible that He should find in us anything but what He has put there Himself.

We may even say that our very emptiness, and our sinful natures, make us the more fit to receive His mercy. Thus can the grace of God show itself the more abundantly. For the sinful being, who is conscious of nothing within except sin and infirmity, cannot assume merit in receiving the gift of God. *'Therefore does God choose the weak things of this world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.'*¹

Nothing then is so worthy of mercy as our great misery. Jesus Christ came from Heaven to save sinners, not to call the righteous; He came to seek for that which was lost, and without Him, all were lost.' *'They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.'*² God loves those who present themselves boldly to Him, in all their filthy

¹ 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

² St. Matt. ix. 12.

rags, beseeching Him, as their Father, to give them a garment worthy of Himself.

He who is thus truly humble is one of those little children concerning whom Jesus has said that it is they who shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. A little child does not know what he needs ; he can do nothing, understand nothing, but just suffer himself to be led. Let us give ourselves up bravely. If God did nothing for us, it would be but justice, since we deserve nothing. But if He does much, it will be all to His glory ; and we shall say, with Mary, '*Blessed is He who hath regarded our low estate ; for He that is mighty hath done to us great things, and holy is His name.*'¹

¹ St. Luke i. 48, 49.

IX.

CONCERNING DISTRACTIONS AND DEPRESSION.

IT appears to me that you are in difficulty respecting two things : one is, to avoid distractions of mind, the other is, how to avoid giving way to depression.

With regard to distractions of mind, you will not cure them by arguing with yourself. Do not expect to carry out the work of grace through the resources and efforts of nature. Content yourself with yielding your will unreservedly to God, and with never encountering any trial without accepting it willingly from His divine providence. Take good heed not to anticipate these trials ; yet, when it is God who brings before you even the possibility of their occurring, without your having sought for them, never let such opportunities pass fruitlessly.

Accept, in spite of the shrinking of your nature, all that God may thus present to you, as a means by which He will try your faith. Do not at all trouble yourself as to whether you will, when the time comes, have strength to carry out that which you are now enabled to resolve. As the present need, so will be the grace given; and the grace sufficient for the time in which such prospects of suffering are brought before you, is that which enables you to accept them willingly beforehand, in case it shall please God to bring them about. Having done this, go on your way in quietness and confidence. Provided this disposition of your mind is not altered by clinging voluntarily to anything which is contrary to the will of God for you, it will abide. *'For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'*¹

Your imagination may wander to many foolish matters; it may be more or less disturbed by the places in which you are, or by the subjects, whether agreeable or distressing, which affect you. But it matters not. Such distractions are inevitable; and

¹ Phil. ii. 13.

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provided they are involuntary, they will never really come between you and God. Only the disturbance of your will can do that.

If you truly desire no distractions, those that may arise will never harm you, and it will be perfectly true to say that your prayers can never have failed. Each time that you perceive any distraction, you have only to let it drop. Do not struggle with it, but turn your heart back to God peacefully, and without discouragement. Until you have perceived the distraction, it does not affect the heart. But as soon as you do perceive it, lift your eyes to God. If you thus faithfully return to His presence every time that you perceive your condition, you will gain more and more of His grace ; and, unless I am greatly mistaken, His presence will soon become familiar to you.

This faithfulness in turning away from other subjects whenever one perceives any distraction, cannot long be practised by our souls without obtaining the gift of constant devotion. But do not imagine that you can obtain it by your own efforts ; such an idea would make you constrained.

and scrupulous, and would cause you to be restless in those very matters in which you especially require freedom. You would be constantly fearing lest you should lose the sense of God's presence, and, in seeking to regain it, would delude yourself with phantoms of your own imagination. Thus would the presence of God (which should, by the sweetness of the light it sheds, facilitate all your occupations) be a constant source of anxiety, and it would so agitate you as to render you almost incapable of fulfilling the external duties of your life.

Never be disquieted, therefore, because you may have lost the immediate perception of God's presence, and be careful not to attempt to retain that sense of His presence by your own reasoning or by elaborate reflections. Content yourself, whilst you are occupied with the details of your business in the course of the day, with such a general tendency of the heart, that, if you were asked at any moment to give account of its position, you might truly say that it was turned towards God, although just then you were attending to some

other matter. And do not trouble yourself about those wandering thoughts which you feel that you cannot prevent. One does but increase such distractions by fearing them too much, or by regretting them too keenly when they are past.

What would you say to a man who, being on a journey, should spend his time in anticipating the misfortunes he might encounter, instead of hastening forwards; and who, when he had met with an accident, should stay contemplating the place where he had fallen? Would you not tell him to go on with his journey? and so do I also speak to you: Press forwards, do not look back, do not loiter. ‘*So walk,*’ says the Apostle, ‘*that ye may abound more and more.*’¹ If the love of God abound in you, it will certainly correct all your failings far better than your own anxiety, or than any amount of self-contemplation.

This rule is extremely simple, all too simple for the natural heart. We like to do something for ourselves; we want to help ourselves onwards. But the great advantage of this rule is that it keeps the

¹ Thes. iv. 1.

heart in that condition of true faith in which it leans on God alone, yielding itself wholly to Him, dying to self, by suppressing all that arises from self. This leaves no room for a multiplicity of external observances, which would only hamper those people who are called to busy lives, and injure the health of others. It is all a matter of love only, of simple love ; by reason of which we delight in doing whatever Love gives us to do. How can we be overburdened when we bear only that which we love to bear ? And this same remedy, if truly applied, will cure all our sadness of heart.

Depression often arises because, in seeking after God, we do not feel the sense of His presence sufficiently to satisfy us. But the desire to receive His consolations is by no means the same thing as longing after Himself. Rather is it a desire to assure ourselves of His favour, for our own sakes, and in order that we may be comforted. Our nature, weary and easily discouraged even to impatience, refuses to live by faith alone ; we make every effort to escape from it ; we long for some prop to the weakness of self ; we wish at any

rate to see and feel our progress. At the sight of our own faults our pride is wounded, and we mistake this wounded pride for true penitence. We wish, through mere self-love, to have the pleasure of seeing ourselves perfect; and we blame ourselves for not arriving at perfection. Then we become out of humour with ourselves, and with everyone else. As though the work of God could be accomplished by our impatience! As though we could grow in union with the God of peace, by losing peace! *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things*, in the service of Jesus Christ. But one thing is needful,¹ namely, to love, and to sit in stillness at His feet.

When we have surrendered ourselves entirely to God, all that we do is well done, even though we may do but little. We meet the future trustfully, desiring unreservedly whatever God wills, and we shut our eyes to that which may be in store for us. But, for the present, we apply our utmost diligence to the fulfilment of that which He pleases. Sufficient for each day is the evil and the good thereof

¹ St. Luke x. 41, 42.

This daily accomplishment of God's will is the coming of His kingdom within our hearts, and contains within itself our 'daily bread.' It is faithless to wish to penetrate into the future which God has concealed from our eyes. We leave it in His hands; it remains with Him to make it sweet or bitter, long or short—'*Let Him do that which seemeth good in His eyes.*' The most perfect preparation for the future consists in dying now to self-will, giving oneself wholly to the will of God.

When we are thus prepared for all that may come, we begin to feel firm ground beneath our feet; our hearts grow tranquil as regards both the past and the future. We believe of ourselves all the evil that can be imagined, but we cast ourselves blindly into the arms of our God. We lose—we forget ourselves; and this forgetfulness of self is the truest repentance; for all true conversion to God consists in leaving self in order to be occupied with Him. Herein is the true martyrdom of self. We would a hundredfold rather contradict ourselves, blame ourselves, torment ourselves, body and mind, than forget ourselves; for forgetfulness

is the destruction of self-love, it leaves it no resource. And then does the heart truly expand; our burden is lifted away. As we become free from all the weight of self by which we were borne down, we are astonished to find how straight and simple our path becomes.

We had thought that strife would be perpetual, that always there must be some unremitting effort; on the contrary, we perceive how little we have to do. We have but to look ever trustfully towards God, as to the Father who leads us each moment by the hand. If some distraction of thought causes us to lose sight of Him, we turn back to Him again without pausing to look at the hindrance, and He gives us to feel that which He pleases. If we have sinned, our repentance is that sorrow which springs from love only; we simply return to Him from whom we had strayed. The sin appears hateful to us; but the humiliation which arises from it, and for the sake of which God had permitted us to fall into it, appears good. Just as the reflections which spring from pride, concerning our own failures, are bitter, and full of restless misery, so the peaceful

return of the soul to God, even after failures, is full of sweetness, of true devotion, and of trustfulness.

You will soon find, by your own experience, how far more this simple and peaceful return to God will correct that which is amiss in you, than all your own vexation with yourself for the faults that overcome you. *'If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'*¹ Only be faithful in coming simply to God directly you perceive anything amiss. It is of no use quarrelling with yourself about it; it is not with yourself that you can do anything. Whilst you are scolding yourself for your misery, you are only taking that same self into your counsel. Poor counsel indeed, in which God is not!

And whose hand is it that can be stretched out to draw you from the mire? Is it your own? Alas! it is your own that led you there; you have not the slightest power to free yourself. Self is the very source of the mischief; the depth of the evil is that you cannot escape from yourself. Do you think,

¹ 1 St. John i. 2.

then, that you can get out of your difficulty by consulting with your own self, and by brooding over your own weakness ! The slightest look towards God will do far more towards quieting your heart than any self-contemplation. His presence draws us out of ourselves, and that is exactly what you are needing. Come out of self, and you will be at peace ; and to accomplish this it is only necessary to look to Him in quietness of spirit, and to acquire, gradually, the habit of always turning back to Him every time that you find yourself in the least drawn aside.

Much natural depression arises from physical causes, and may be met by physical remedies. It is true that it returns again and again, but this is not dependent on our own will. When God sends such depression, it must be borne patiently, as we would bear an illness, or any other bodily suffering. The spirit may be in utter darkness—clothed, as it were, in deepest mourning ; but the will, which depends on faith alone, is able to bear even this trial. We are at peace, because we are submissive to the will of God. It is not a question of what

we are feeling, but of what our will desires. We accept all that is given ; we would have nothing at all which we have not. We would not even, by any effort of our own, deliver ourselves from our suffering ; for it belongs to God alone to measure out to us our trials, and our consolations. Like St. Paul, we '*rejoice in the midst of tribulation* ;' it is not the joy of sentiment, but of pure will.

The wicked, in the midst of pleasures, have but a mingled delight, for they are never satisfied ; there are always some annoyances of which they long to be rid, or some enjoyments to be tasted which they feel to be still lacking.

But he who is faithful accepts freely all the suffering which God gives ; he loves—he welcomes it ; he would not escape from it though it should cost but a wish, for that wish would be contrary to his true desire, which is only to surrender himself entirely to God's providence, and to depart in nothing from that which He appoints.

If anything can bring the heart true liberty, it is this surrender of ourselves. '*Then is our peace like a river, and our righteousness as the waves of*

*the sea.'*¹ If anything can make the mind serene, driving away its scrupulousness, and even its darkest fears, softening all pain by the sweetness of love, giving fresh life to every action, and making the very countenance shine with the joy of the Holy Spirit, it is this simple conduct, fresh and childlike in the love of God. But we *will* reason, and we spoil all by our reasoning. There is a temptation to reasoning which we should dread as we dread any other temptation. There is a self-contemplation which is the more especially dangerous in that we do not regard it as an evil, but mistake it for the watchfulness enjoined upon us. But the watchfulness which Jesus Christ commands is a faithful care that we love God unceasingly; that we fulfil His will at the present time, according to the indications He gives us. It does not consist in being anxious, in tormenting ourselves, in being occupied with self, but in lifting our eyes to Him who is '*our refuge and strength, our very present help in time of trouble.*'²

Why will we turn aside from His presence, which

¹ Isa. xlviii. 18.

² Ps. xlv. 1.

He would make our constant blessing? He has not said be *yourself* the object before whom you walk, but '*Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.*'

David, full of the Holy Spirit, said, 'I have set the Lord always before me. *Mine eyes are ever looking unto the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.*'¹ The danger lies at his feet, but his eyes are lifted on high. It is of much less use to consider our danger than to consider the *help that cometh of God*. Moreover, in God we can see all truly; we see at once our misery and His goodness; the same glance discovers both in His Divine light. But in our own darkness what can we see, except darkness itself?

O my God, let me never cease to behold Thee, then shall I never cease to behold my own poverty; I shall see myself the more truly by looking on Thee. When external occupations hinder me from contemplating Thee alone, still may I behold Thee, O Lord, working in all around me. So shall I

¹ Ps. xxv. 15.

rejoice in seeing Thy will ever being fulfilled within myself, and in all things. ‘*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.*’¹

I will undertake nothing without watching for the indications of Thy will. In whatever condition Thou shalt appoint for me, I will worship Thee and hold communion with Thee, every hour, every moment that Thou leavest free to me for that purpose. I will never quit this happy state except when Thou callest me to some external duty. When I go forth, Thou wilt go with me, Thou wilt bear me in Thy bosom. Devotion will not lessen my interest in others, or check my intercourse with them ; for I shall desire to please them in order to please Thee.

If Thou wilt make use of me for Thy work, I deliver myself to Thee. Without thinking of self, I will simply pour forth on others what Thou hast poured out on me. I will not stop timidly, or look back, however difficult may be the duty ; I will act simply as in Thy sight, knowing whom I serve.

¹ Ps. xxiii. 4.

If, on the other hand, it does not please Thee to use me, I will be still. I will anticipate Thine orders in nothing. I will occupy myself quietly about those things to which Thou dost limit me. For, according to the grace Thou hast bestowed upon me, I desire nothing and would refuse nothing ; I am ready for all. Whether I am sought after or despised, known or ignored, praised or contradicted, what matters ! It is Thyself, not Thy gifts, that I seek. All conditions, if they be good in Thy sight, are equally welcome to me. *Amen.*

X.

ON REMEDIES AGAINST DEPRESSION.

WITH regard to a certain form of depression which makes the heart feel sorely and heavily cast down, there are two rules which it seems to me important to observe. The first is, to use whatever means God has placed within our reach to remedy the depression ; not over-working the mind by burdens disproportioned to its strength ; managing conscientiously the health of both body and soul ; reserving always sufficient time for prayer, for reading, and also for cheering conversation with others, that so we may refresh both mind and body in due proportion to their needs.

And if our hearts are overburdened by some trouble which involves no secret entrusted to us by any one else, it is well to find a discreet and safe person to whom we can confide the whole matter ;

for this greatly relieves and lightens the oppressed heart. Often hidden troubles swell the heart almost to bursting; whereas, if they can but have vent, it will be seen that they were not worthy of producing half the bitterness they have been causing us. Nothing frees the soul more speedily from a certain darkness and gloom than the simplicity of making known our trouble, in all humility, and at the expense of our own pride; seeking for that help and consolation which should be afforded in the fellowship which God's children have one with another.

The second rule is, to bear patiently all the involuntary feelings of depression from which we may still suffer, even in spite of the precautions here spoken of. Often these times of inward trial teach us the truest lessons of faith faster than anything else could do, provided we do not suffer ourselves to be hindered in the progress we should make by dwelling on our own sadness; for in that case the depression will but take a stronger hold upon us. One step forwards, at such a time, lifts us on wonderfully, and takes us further on our

road than many steps taken in hours of sweetness and consolation. We have, then, only to disregard our own sadness of heart and still to press onwards ; so will this state of weakness prove more helpful to us than the utmost strength and courage of which we could be rendered capable.

The perceptible courage which makes us feel our path so easy, is often but deceitful. It frequently nourishes self-confidence ; and, though it may be very edifying to others, it is apt to cause a kind of inward satisfaction which may become to ourselves a secret poison.

But the soul which is brought low in deepest humiliation, which finds no inward resource, which is troubled even unto death, which cries, ‘ My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ! ’ is being far more truly purified from self, and is learning more of real mortification than they can attain who are rejoicing in their strength, and tasting the fruits of their own virtue.

Blessed is that soul whom God abases, crushes even to the earth, from whom God so takes away all her own strength that she may lean only on

Him, who, seeing her poverty, is content to be poor, and who, besides other trials, bears the heavy cross of inward discouragement, in comparison of which all other crosses weigh but lightly!

I should, in truth, fear all for you if you felt established in well-doing, if you felt yourself strong to persevere; but I hope all for you when I see you thus despairing of your own strength. How weak we are when we believe ourselves strong! Oh how strong are we, in God's strength, when we learn the most deeply to feel our own weakness!

XI.

*GOD IS SO LITTLE LOVED BECAUSE HE IS
SO LITTLE KNOWN.*

WE need scarcely wonder that men will make so little effort to serve God, or that they think so much of the little they do ; they do not know Him, they barely realise the fact of His existence. The belief they have is rather a blind deference to public opinion than a clear and lively conviction of His Divinity. They suppose that they believe in Him, because they hardly dare to examine the question, and because they are rendered indifferent on the subject by the eagerness with which they are absorbed in other matters. They imagine God to be something mysterious, and far away from us ; they think of Him as one who is powerful and who demands homage from us, and against whose judgments it is well to take certain pre-

cautions. Such are the thoughts of the greater number of those who reflect at all on the subject ; and even those are comparatively few. We say, That person fears God ; and, in fact, such persons do but fear Him, they do not love Him at all. Would we be treated by a child of our own, or even by a servant, as we treat God ? It is because we do not know Him that we act thus towards Him, for they who know Him cannot choose but to love Him. *'God is love ; he that loveth not, knoweth not God'*¹ for who can know Love without loving ?

O my God ! before the heavens and the earth were created Thou wert God from everlasting. By thine almighty power Thou didst create the earth, Thou didst *'speak the word and it was done ; Thou didst command, and it stood fast.'*²

But for what purpose didst Thou create this world ? Thou didst make all for man, and man was made for Thee. Such is the order Thou hast established, and woe therefore to the soul that shall reverse Thine order, choosing to have all for

¹ 1 St. John iv. 8.

² Ps. xxxiii. 9.

self, and to be absorbed in self! No, my God! Thou hast pardon for the sinful soul that hath rebelled against Thee, because Thou mayest yet fill such a one with thy love, but Thine anger is kindled against the soul that seeketh Thy gifts for her own selfish use, refusing to yield herself in sincere love to her Creator. To seek Thee in order to enjoy the privileges Thou wilt bestow, is not yielding oneself to Thee; rather is it the desire of bringing Thee down to our own level. The only true yielding of ourselves to our Creator is the absolute surrender of self; it is to forget, to lose oneself in Thee, to have neither will, nor honour, nor peace but in Thine: in a word, it is to love Thee.

How many souls quit this life laden with virtues and good works, yet lacking that simple purity without which they cannot see God! how many are satisfied with their own acquirements who do not even understand the meaning of a true and unreserved surrender of self. It sounds too harsh to their ears, it offends them; but, alas! how will

they regret their self-satisfaction, the empty rewards which they had not courage to forego !

O God ! so glorious in Thy power, and, at the same time, so tender in Thy love, so high above the heavens, yet adapting Thyself to the needs of Thine own creatures ; so infinite, yet dwelling within our hearts in closest union ; so just, and yet so easily entreated by those who love Thee ; when will even Thine own children cease to misunderstand Thee ? Who will give me a voice powerful enough to reproach the world with its blindness, to announce with authority the truth as it is in Thee ?

As for me, O Lord ! I would close my heart to all outward objects, which are but vanity and vexation of spirit, that so I may learn the secret of true communion with Thee. Beneath the cross of Christ, let it cost me what it may, I would become humble and poor in spirit ; there would I become full of the Holy Ghost. But who am I, that I should aspire to such things ? Yet it is not I, sinful and weak creature, who am but dust ; it is Thou, O Jesus, who livest in me. Thou givest

these desires ; Thou wilt fulfil them ; and Thy grace will be the more glorious by thus triumphing in one so utterly unworthy.

O my God ! I have found over and over again that I can neither overcome my temper, nor change my habits, nor conquer my pride ; I cannot even obey my own reason, or continue to desire what I have once desired. It is Thou who dost work in me the longing for that which is good, and it is Thou who wilt keep alive in me this longing. Without Thee I am but a reed, shaken by every wind. All that is good within me is of Thee. It is Thou who hast created in me a new heart, which thirsteth after Thy holiness.

I give myself thankfully into Thy hand, O my God ! turn me whichever way Thou wilt. Mould this clay into the shape that shall please Thee. I am all Thine, do with me as may seem good in Thine eyes. It is sufficient if Thou wilt use me for thy purposes, and if nothing within me shall resist Thy good pleasure, for which I was made. Show me what Thou wilt have me to do ;

show me what Thou wilt have me leave undone ;
be it unto me according to Thy word.

But, whilst Thou art thus working within me, Thou art also working in all things. I find, in the smallest atoms that exist, traces of the same mighty hand which upholdeth the heavens and the earth. All that Thou doest is perfect. Whence then doth it arise that the earth is so full of crime and misery ? Thou hast made the world for Thine honour, yet we are tempted to believe that it turneth to Thy dishonour. The number of the unrighteous far exceed the number of those who serve Thee, and even those few are but half serving Thee. O God ! arise, give glory to Thy Name. Teach them that blaspheme Thee how almighty Thou art. Arise, O Lord God ! arise, tread Thine enemies under foot.

But, O my Lord ! how marvellous are Thy judgments ! As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are Thy ways higher than our ways. We are impatient, for our life is but for a moment. Thou art from everlasting, therefore is Thy patience full of longsuffering. *'A thousand years are in*

Thy sight even as a day that is past ;’ times and seasons are all in Thine own power. We do not comprehend, we become impatient ; we are offended, and imagine that Thou regardest not the evil. We see not the abundance of good which Thou art bringing out of the evils Thou hast permitted to exist. Thou sufferest them to exist only in order to produce yet greater blessings ; and Thou showest Thine all-powerful grace in the skill with which Thou makest use of the evil.

O God ! I know from Thine own words that Thou hatest nothing that Thou hast made, that Thou art not willing that any should perish. *‘ Thou art the Saviour of all men, specially of those who believe.’*¹ When Thou shalt judge the earth, Thou shalt be victorious in thy judgment ; even the condemned shall see but equity in their condemnation. Then wilt Thou show that *‘ nothing more could have been done to Thy vineyard which Thou hast not done in it.’*²

My God ! Thou art infinite in all ; infinite in love as well as in wisdom and power. Thou

¹ 1 Timothy iv. 10.

² Isaiah v. 4.

lovest as God alone can love ; and, thus loving, Thou hast moved heaven and earth in order to save that which is beloved by Thee. Thou didst become man—a little child—Thou wert despised and rejected of men, dying a death of shame in all the agony of the cross. And this was not too much for Thy boundless love !

When shall we learn to yield Thee love for love ? When shall we seek Him who seeketh us ? who beareth us in His own arms ? Even in the bosom of His love we forget Him ; for in the sweetness of His own gifts, we forget Himself ! His love pursues us ever, and we would elude His search. We think ourselves alone, when He leaves us nothing but Himself ; we think we are ruined when we have no resource but in His Providence, as though His perfect and almighty love were nothing to us ! Most strange delusion, reversing all truth !

Yet, O Love ! Thou bearest with us still ; Thou waitest with unending patience. Thou dost even appear, by such boundless patience, to permit ingratitude ! Even those who desire to serve Thee,

love but for their own sakes ; for their comfort, or for the safety of their souls. Where are they who love Thee for Thyself alone ? Where are they who love Thee because they were made for loving Thee ? what purpose can we serve, except we so love Thee as to lose ourselves in Thee ?

O God ! O Love ! love Thyself in me ; then only canst Thou be loved as Thou shouldst be loved. I would subsist only in order that I may burn with Thy love, even as a lamp which unceasingly burneth. I am jealous of myself for Thy sake. Rather would I perish than that the love which is due to Thee should be wasted on myself. Love me, O Love ! love thine own sovereign beauty in Thy weak creature. O infinite Beauty, infinite Holiness, infinite Love ! transport, consume my heart ; make of it a burnt offering, a sacrifice of sweet savour unto Thee. O Lord, I adore Thee ! Thou hast made me for Thyself, and I am for ever Thine.

XII.

*FORGETFULNESS OF SELF DOES NOT HINDER
OUR GRATITUDE FOR THE BENEFITS WHICH
GOD BESTOWS UPON US.*

FORGETFULNESS of self does not, in those who desire to seek God for His own sake, prevent thankfulness for His benefits. For such forgetfulness does not consist in never seeing what concerns oneself; but in never being wrapped up in self; and in never being occupied with our own sorrow or delight by reason of our own right in them. Such self-interest keeps us from pure and simple love by narrowing our hearts; it hinders our perfection by causing us to seek it with too much eagerness, and for our own sakes.

But when we cease to be voluntarily occupied with our own private interest, we do not fail, in looking on God, to obtain also a view of our own

hearts. It is in His light that we see ourselves truly, as in a mirror, wherein the slightest spot on the soul is rendered visible.

A peasant, accustomed to dwell only in his own village, scarcely realises his poverty. But take him to some rich palace, some royal court, and he will understand the meanness of his own condition ; he will hate the sight of his own rags when he looks on the magnificence around him. Even thus do we perceive our own vileness in the presence of God's great and infinite perfection.

Prove, as clearly as you will, the vanity and corruption of human nature, the uncertainty of life, the fickleness of fortune, the emptiness of all worldly honour, the bitterness that must arise out of every earthly treasure ; all this, however true, will never touch the heart ; it can produce no real change in any man. He will sigh at his slavery, and he will continue a slave. But so soon as one ray of heavenly light illuminates the heart, he has a glimpse into the infinite depth of goodness, which is God ; and into the depth of misery and corruption which is in himself. Then will he hate

himself and desire to escape from himself; then will he give himself up to God, and lose himself in Him. Blessed loss! for thus does he find himself again; he has no further self-interest, yet all is his, all works for good to those that love God.

Observe that those who are not yet far advanced in this renunciation of self, still look upon the benefits they receive from the goodness of God, with more or less reference to their own gain, in proportion as they still cling more or less to self. But those who are further purified in heart regard the mercies shown to others with as much love and satisfaction as those shown to themselves. They so love the good pleasure of God, and the riches of His grace, that they delight in that glory which He derives from the sanctification of others as much as in that which He derives from their own sanctification. It is God alone who is all in all; it is He who is loved, admired, who is the only joy of such hearts. They rejoice in God's mercies to themselves, not for their own sakes, but for love of Him. They thank Him for doing His blessed will, and for glorifying His

name ; they love the gifts of God for His own sake, and for His honour.

Since, however, nothing is more dangerous than trying to go faster than we are being led, it would be hurtful to any soul that is still needing the especial support of the mere sentiment of gratitude to deprive itself of the nourishment which is thus afforded, and to strive after a higher degree of perfection in love than is, as yet, suitable for its capacity. Love will sanctify the heart, even though it be not a purely disinterested love, and we must wait for God to purify it in His own good time. It would be trying to anticipate His work, and undertaking to do that which He reserves to Himself alone, if we were to deprive ourselves of every motive in which self-interest may mingle itself with love for God. Let no man constrain his heart in this matter, or try to give up, prematurely, the support which his infirmity may need. The child who tries to walk alone too soon cannot but fall.

Let us, therefore, feed our hearts with gratitude whenever gratitude refreshes them ; let us love the

mercies of God, in whatever way that love may best support us. But if, in due time, God opens our heart to a purer and more generous love, a love which shall wholly lose itself in Him, which shall seek His glory and that alone, let us yield ourselves unhesitatingly to this more excellent way.

And when we thus love the mercies of God—when they fill our hearts with joy and admiration at the mere pleasure of seeing His great goodness—when we are the most touched, in all He does, by the fulfilment of His will, by the glory He shall receive from that which it pleases Him to do, by the greatness which He shows in making *a vessel of honour out of that which was fitted to destruction*, let us render Him the deeper thanks, because the blessing is yet greater. For the highest and purest of all God's gifts is the gift of loving them for His sake only, and of seeking our own gain in nothing.

XIII.

ON LISTENING TO THE INWARD VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND ON FOLLOWING THE INSPIRATION WHICH LEADS US TO AN ENTIRE RENUNCIATION OF ALL.

IT is perfectly clear, from the Scriptures, that the Spirit of God dwells within us; that He works in our hearts, makes intercession therein, asks within us that which we know not how to pray for as we ought, leads us, animates us, speaks to our hearts, guides us into all truth, '*joins us to the Lord in one spirit.*'¹ This our faith teaches us; and even those learned men who know but little of the inward, spiritual life cannot but acknowledge it. Nevertheless, though they cannot deny these principles, they practically appear to consider that it is rather some external law, or at most a certain doctrinal light joined to the light of reason, which is

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

our guide. They do not reckon sufficiently on the internal teaching of the Holy Spirit, who works within us. He is the very Soul of our souls ; we can neither think nor desire that which is good but through Him. Alas for our blindness, when we consider ourselves hidden in the sanctuary of our hearts ! for God is more intimately acquainted with its recesses than we are ourselves.

You will ask me, perhaps, Are we therefore to consider ourselves inspired ? Most certainly we are inspired, though in a different manner from the Apostles and Prophets. Without the actual inspiration of the Holy Spirit we could neither do, nor wish to do, nor even think any good thing. We are constantly inspired ; but we constantly stifle the inspiration. It is not that God ceases to speak, but it is the noise of all around us, and of our own passions within us, which deafen our senses, and prevent us from hearing His words. All must be still ; we must be silent ourselves, if we would hearken to the blessed voice of God's Spirit. We must listen intently, for it is a still, soft voice, heard only by those who care to hear nothing else.

Oh, how few there are who can be silent enough in their own hearts to hear God thus speaking to them! The least murmur of our foolish desires, one whisper of self-love, will prevent us from hearing the words of God's Holy Spirit. We may perceive, indeed, that He speaks, that He asks something of us, but we know not what; too often we are content not to find out. The least reservation, the slightest self-consciousness, any unwillingness to understand fully all that God requires of us, will check that voice in our hearts. Can we wonder, then, that many people, even those who are religious, but who still cling to their own enjoyments and their vanities, to their false wisdom and their self-confidence, believe this inward voice to be some wild chimera of fancy? Often such people, full of self and of their own enlightenment, listen to themselves too much for it to become possible that they should hear God. They will insist on turning everything into a matter of reason; they will act on certain principles of natural wisdom and prudence, in order to gain that which, after all, would be gained infinitely

better through the channel of simple watchfulness for the blessed guidance of God's Spirit.

O God, I thank Thee, with Christ Jesus our Lord, '*that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*'¹ It is with childlike souls that Thou dost lovingly converse; Thou dost deal with the rest even as they have desired. They seek for knowledge and for exalted virtues, and Thou dost grant them these brilliant gifts; they are very heroes in the sight of men. But not thus is the '*better part*' to be found. Thou hast something more precious for Thy little children. It is they who, like St. John, rest on Thine own bosom. The proud, who will not stoop to become little, Thou leavest to their pride; Thou dost treat them according to their wisdom. They can never receive Thy caresses for we must be as little children, to receive the full sweetness of Thy Love. God finds, as it were, no resting place in those souls that are full of wisdom and virtue; but He *giveth grace to the lowly*.

Where are they, these lowly ones? I can find

¹ St. Matt. xi. 25.

none of them ; but God sees them, and it is His pleasure to abide in them.

When the soul is so filled with the grace of God as to lose self in Him, when we count ourselves for nothing, following unreservedly the guidance of pure love, how many things do we learn which wise men can neither perceive nor understand. I too confess that I have been wise, even as others ; but then, believing that I could see all, I saw nothing. I felt my way through a course of reasoning ; but no light shone into that darkness. It is when all within us is made to keep silence that we can hearken to the voice of God. Then we know all, without knowing anything. Then we find how ignorant we were of the very matters which we fancied ourselves to understand so well. We let all go,—all by which we had been holding so tightly ; we care for it no longer ; we lose all, for we lose ourselves. But there is that within us which makes us say with the Bride in the Song of Solomon, '*Oh let me hear Thy voice, for it is sweet to my ears.*'¹ How precious is that voice ! it echoes through

¹ Song of Solomon ii. 14.

and through the heart. Speak, O Heavenly Bridegroom ; let none but Thyself speak within me. Be still, my soul ; speak, O Love !

I say that we know all ; but I do not mean that we are presumptuous enough to suppose ourselves to possess all truth. On the contrary, we feel that we know nothing, that we can do nothing, that we are nothing. We feel this, and we are thankful to feel it ; for in the infinite depths of God's love we find all that we need. We find there the daily bread of truth, as also all other provision, without laying up any store for ourselves. Thus does the Holy Spirit lead us into all truth ; for truth is essentially comprehended in the full sacrifice of self, in the love which so loses self as to belong only to God.

At first God dealt with us through external matters. He detached us by degrees from all that we loved too much, or for which our love was not in harmony with His will. But this external handling, although necessary in building the foundations of His work in us, was but a small portion of the whole. How far greater, though it may be less

visible, is the internal work ; how far more difficult, and more marvellous ! For there comes at last a time when God, having mortified our affections through all the props on which we had desired to lean, will so work in our hearts as to deprive us of ourselves. We love self more deeply than all the rest, and it is that self of which God demands the full surrender. Cut the branches of a tree, and instead of destroying it you may but strengthen the stem ; it may push out afresh on all sides. But attack the trunk, dry up the root, and the whole will wither, languish, die. And even thus does God desire that self should die within us.

As to the mortification of our external senses, He frequently enables us to carry it out by certain efforts which He gives us courage to make. But to Himself alone does God reserve the power of working in the very depth of our souls. Then is it no longer in courage that we struggle against external matters ; it is in very weakness that the soul is turned against itself. We see ourselves truly, we dread what we see, and we cling to God in faith ; but we do not perceive our own faithful-

ness. All the evil of our natures appears to rise against us, and fresh evils appear of which we never should have dreamed. There is no longer any support in the fervent earnestness which had been so much to us. Our heart fails within us; like Jesus, our *soul is troubled even unto death*. The only thing remaining to us is the determination to withhold nothing, to let God deal with us just as He pleases; yet we scarcely have the consolation of perceiving in ourselves even this desire. For it is not the desire of fervent reflection, but simply of the will, concealed in the very depths of our souls. Then does God truly work within us all that is needed to wean us wholly from self. Little by little He deprives us of all the false support on which we rested.

If you ask me in what such deprivations consist, I cannot tell you. They differ as men differ from one another. Each one suffers the loss of that which God sees it needful for him to give up. How are we to tell what garments will be taken from us, when we know not in what we have wrapped ourselves? We hold by many things that

we do not imagine ourselves to care for; we find how much we were attached to them only when they are taken from us. God discovers to us, little by little, the depths that are unknown to ourselves; even in our very virtues we find evil that we had never suspected.

Such deprivations are rarely those we should have anticipated. That which we are expecting finds us on our guard, and does not help so much to destroy our self-love. God takes us by surprise, in the ways we should never have thought likely. It may often be by trifles that He teaches us; but if so, it will be by trifles that we feel keenly. It is not a question of great virtues, which would only sustain our pride; such is not the purpose of God for us, which is rather to leave no resting-place for self. Our conduct becomes simple, even commonplace. No one sees anything great in us, nor do we see anything in ourselves but weakness and failure. Only we could far more easily fast all our lives long on bread and water, than suffer what we are now inwardly suffering. Not that we have any desire for austerities; that taste has faded away.

But we find in the suppleness of our will, which God demands in a thousand little ways, far more self-mortification than would be gained by any great sacrifices.

God does not suffer the soul to rest until He has rendered it supple and pliable in every way. We must learn to speak bravely, then to be silenced ; to bear praise, then blame ; we must be forgotten by others, then brought into notice ; we must be exalted, then brought low ; we must learn to be condemned when the word we may not speak would at once justify us, and at another time we must say that which is good of ourselves. We must bear weakness, restlessness, irresolution about the merest trifles. We must bear to shock the taste of our friends, and our own ; to seem faithless, dull of heart, weary, ready to despair. Such inward troubles occur to me as examples of those by which God moulds each soul according to His own design.

Let it not be said that these are mere imaginations. Can it be doubted that God acts directly on the soul ? Can it be doubted that He so acts in order to make us die to self ? Can it be doubted

that God, after having torn us from other passions, attacks the inward subtleties of self-love, and especially in those who have the most fully and unreservedly yielded themselves to the work of His Spirit? The more thoroughly He will purify them, the more deeply does He try them. The world does not see these trials; it has neither eyes to perceive them, nor ears to hear of them; but the world is blind; its wisdom is darkness; it cannot sympathise with the spirit of truth. There is none save the *Spirit of God who searcheth the deep things of God*.¹

At first we do not understand this internal treatment, which leads us to strip ourselves so entirely. We desire, truly, to worship God in stillness of heart, to suffer ourselves to be led by His providence, as a man may suffer himself to be borne along by the current of a stream. But we hardly dare listen to the inward voice which calls on us to make those sacrifices which God is preparing for us. We are like the child Samuel, to whom the word of the Lord was not yet revealed. The Lord called him, and he ran to Eli; and Eli replied, '*Thou art*

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 10.

dreaming, my child ; no one called thee, lie down again.' Thus do we also fear it may be some imagination which would lead us too far. And often does the high-priest Eli, in the person of our advisers, tell us that we are but dreaming ; that we had better lie down again and be at rest. But God will not suffer it ; He arouses us until we listen to His words. Were it a question of visions, of appearances, of miracles, it would be well to hesitate ; but when God has led us to a certain point of self-renunciation, and then speaks inwardly to our souls, demanding from us the sacrifice of things in themselves innocent, but of which the surrender can but teach us truer simplicity, and enable us to die more really to ourselves—where can be the delusion in following these suggestions ? Our very unwillingness proves that these suggestions are from God, since all our feelings and all our self-love tend to hold us back. The more we fear such things, the more do we need them ; the fear arises from our own sensitiveness, from being too much attached to our own tastes and desires. And we must die to our natural desires. All excuse for

drawing back is taken away by the very conviction, which is at the bottom of our hearts, that these sacrifices will help to destroy self.

It is suppleness of will and readiness to follow every such indication, that lift the soul onwards. Those who have sufficient largeness of heart to press on without hesitation make surprising advances. The rest stop to reason, and they never fail in finding reason enough for not doing what they are anxious to avoid. They wish, and they do not wish ; they wait to be quite certain ; they wait to be advised about everything, in order that the advice they receive may excuse them from doing what they fear to do. At every step they wait to look back ; they weary themselves with irresolution. They grieve the Holy Spirit of God by their hesitations, and at last anger Him by their frequent resistance.

In resisting thus we find plenty of excuses for authorising our resistance ; but, gradually, we wither up our hearts, we lose the simplicity of obedience ; and however we may deceive ourselves, we are no longer at peace ; for we feel in the depth

of our hearts that we are lacking towards God. Oh how pitiable is that soul who once begins to refuse God's secret invitation, when He calls upon us to yield all to Him ! it may be a trifle that is refused, but that trifle becomes a mountain, and it may soon form an impenetrable chaos between ourselves and God. We turn a deaf ear when God demands some simple thing ; we fear to listen ; we try to persuade ourselves that we have heard nothing ; we try to believe this, but we know it is not true. Then we become entangled ; we doubt our former experiences ; even those which had done most towards rendering us simple and childlike in God's hands, all seem now to have been mere delusion. We seek the external help of advisers, in order to quiet our inward trouble, and we seldom fail to meet with it ; for there are many who have but little experience, though they be wise and learned. In this state, every effort towards curing ourselves makes the matter worse. *' Who is he that hath hardened his heart against God, and hath prospered ?'*¹ Can God, in whom

¹ Job ix. 4.

alone is perfect peace, leave that heart in peace which opposeth itself to His will ?

But, you will say, the beginning of all this evil is so slight. True, but the consequences are fearful. There are some who resolve to withhold nothing in the sacrifice they make to God ; at least they feel this to be their desire when they look at matters from a distance, and from a general point of view. But then, when God takes them at their word, He accepts that offer in detail ; and immediately they find a thousand objections which had never occurred to them. Their courage fails, excuses creep in to flatter their weak and trembling hearts. First they pause, they wonder if they ought still to go on ; then they do half of what God requires of them, in order that they may at least retain some resting-place for the self which will not die. They close their eyes, that they may not see what they lack the courage to perform. And God leaves that soul to her weakness and cowardice. But consider how great had been the sin ! The more we have received from God, the more we should render to Him ; and such an one

had received special gifts which even many pious souls had never tasted. God had spared nothing to make that heart His own. But He will not suffer a divided love, still less will He bear with excuses for such division. So long as pure and ingenuous love is thy guide, the Heavenly Bridegroom will bear, with unfailing patience, all thine infirmities, thy mistakes, thy failures; He will look only at the intention of thine heart. But the moment that thy love can refuse anything to thy God, and that thou canst desire to deceive thyself concerning thy refusal, He will regard thee as faithless, and will treat thee accordingly. *‘Look diligently therefore, lest thou fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.’*¹

How many souls, after making great sacrifices, yet fall into this error! It is from a false wisdom that nearly all these miseries arise; for it is not so much the lack of courage as the giving way too much to human wisdom that causes us thus to pause upon our course. It is true that when God calls

¹ Heb. xii. 15.

us to this state of self-renunciation, He treats us according to the surpassing gifts He has bestowed. We have given up all, and He claims all. And can we wonder at this? Can self be dead within us whilst it still breathes? We desire that God should destroy self in us, but we wish to die without pain; we would mortify our old nature, but in the way that we shall ourselves choose; we would give up all, and yet retain all.

Woe to those souls from whom God expects much, and who do not fulfil the desire of His grace! Woe to those who resist His inward teaching! How great, how strangely great, is the sin of quenching the Holy Spirit! Blessed is he who never hesitates, whose only fear is lest he should not follow promptly enough; who would always rather choose to do too much against self than too little. Happy is he who brings all that he has to God's feet, so soon as he is asked for the smallest sample.

We imagine that this state of emptiness must be terrible. Far from it: it is peace; it is liberty. 'The life which resists God is false and miserable,

but the death which yields to Him is all peace, and unites us with Him who is true Life. This blessed death is a "*life hidden with Christ in God.*" Let us then die to all else, that Jesus Christ alone may live in us.' '*So shall we be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God.*'¹

¹ Eph. iii. 18, 19.

XIV.

CONCERNING INTERNAL DEPRIVATIONS AND SUFFERINGS, AND ON LOVING OUR FRIENDS IN GOD AND FOR GOD.

EVEN though God may seem to treat us severely, He never makes us suffer unnecessarily. He gives suffering only that He may purify our hearts. The severity of the operation arises from the evil that has to be taken away. God wounds no healthy part, He cuts away only that which is diseased. It is the corruption of our self-love which causes us to feel so much pain; for the hand of God inflicts as little as possible. Thereby may we judge of the depth and venom of our sores, since God spares us so tenderly, and nevertheless causes us such keen suffering.

And, besides that God gives no pain but such as shall tend to our cure, He never withdraws from us

any of His gifts, except in order to restore them to us an hundredfold. He takes away, in love, even our purest blessings, if we possess them wrongly ; for the purer His gifts, the more jealously does He require that we should hold them without misappropriation. The highest graces may become the most dangerous poisons if we turn them to our own self-support and satisfaction. Such was the sin by which angels fell ; they regarded self in their high position, therefore they '*kept not their first estate ;*' at once they were cast out from heaven, and became for ever the enemies of God.

Their example may prove to us how little men understand the nature of sin. That sin is the greatest of all sins ; yet it is rare indeed to meet with those who are sufficiently purified to hold God's gifts in purity. When we think of the grace of God, it is always for our own sakes ; the love of self has almost invariably some share in our enjoyment of every gift He bestows. We grieve to feel ourselves weak ; we rejoice when we find ourselves strong ; we seldom desire our perfection

only for the glory of God. We are saddened and discouraged directly we lose the sensible enjoyments of grace ; in a word, it is nearly always, with each one of us, a question of self rather than of God.

Thence does it arise that every good disposition in our heart needs purifying ; otherwise it does but strengthen the inward life of self. Our corrupt natures contrive to find some secret nourishment even in those very graces which are in themselves the most contrary to nature. Not only may self-love be fed by austerities and humiliations, it may also be fed by the most extreme sacrifices. There is a wonderful support to us in the satisfaction of feeling that we need no support, that we have given up all faithfully. But to complete the sacrifice, the burnt-offering must be consumed ; we must yield all, even the pleasure of perceiving our own entire mortification.

We can perfectly find God only in this apparent loss of all, even of His best gifts—in that true sacrifice of self which thus looses us from all inward resource. Even to this does the love of

God drive us ; our selfishness compels Him thus to deal with us ; for we will not really lose ourselves in Him till all else fails us. A man who falls into an abyss only lets himself go unresistingly when every support to which he might cling has escaped from his hands. Our self-love, which God thus cast from us, clings in its despair to every shadow, as a drowning man will catch hold even of the reeds which grow in the water.

It is well to understand fully the necessity of this treatment. There is not a single gift, however great it may be, which, after having served for our advancement, does not usually become at last a snare and a stumbling-block, by reason of the self-love which springs up again to soil our hearts. Therefore does God deprive us of that which He had bestowed. He takes it ; but not to keep it from us for ever, only in order to give it back more safely ; only to teach us to receive it without that misappropriation which, though we knew it not, was destroying its value. The loss of the gift teaches us to feel that it was not our own ; and when we have fully learned that lesson, the gift is

restored an hundredfold. Then does it become a mere gift of God no longer, it is God Himself who is our own. It is no longer a gift, for we no longer regard it apart from Him, or as anything that we can possess ; it is to God alone that we look, and He possesses our souls according to His own good pleasure. We learn to remember that a gift cannot be less free than the promise on which it is founded. Life eternal, which is the end of God's purpose for us, is a free gift, and all other graces are but given to us with reference to that one purpose. The grace of love, which contains all others, is founded on no other claim than that of God's free promise, and on the equally free imputation to us of the merits of Jesus Christ. That promise, which is the foundation of all, rests only on the pure mercies of God, on His own good pleasure, and on the blessed purpose of His will. Thus is every gift of His grace referred only to His free and sovereign choice.

The way in which God usually deals with our souls is, at first, to detach them from the world and from its passions, by drawing them to Himself,

enabling them to taste of the sweetness of earnest devotion. Attracted thus, the whole heart willingly turns to prayer and self-denial. We even take pleasure in contradicting ourselves, we refuse external consolations, we withdraw from many of the interests of friendship, lest we should indulge self. We only care to retain those friends to whom we are linked by conformity of religious tastes, or those to whom we feel that the duties of charity bind us. All else becomes a burden; and if we have not yet lost our natural inclination towards others, we nevertheless distrust their friendship, because their religious feelings are not in the same stage as our own.

Many souls never pass out of this condition of fervour and of spiritual abundance; but there are others whom God will lead higher, and whom He jealously strips of the very beauty in which He had clothed them. Then they fall into a state of wretchedness, of dryness of heart and despondency, in which everything is burdensome. A soul in this condition feels that God, and all the gifts He had bestowed, are being withdrawn. It

is a state of misery, and almost of despair; God has taken away even the perception of His love—even the pleasure of serving Him. We know not where we are—the heart is withered, and almost dead; we care for nothing. The bitterness of having lost God, the sweetness of whose love had been tasted in those days of fervour, mingles wormwood with all that had ever been dear to us. Even as a sick person, who feels his faintness for want of food, will nevertheless turn with disgust from the most delicate viands. Speak not at such a time of friendship; the very word is painful and brings tears into the eyes; everything is overpowering; you do not know what you would have. One is like a child, and equally full of fancies for which no reason can be given; for so soon as one speaks of reasons, they vanish like a dream. What you say of yourself always appears untrue, for it ceases to be true as soon as you speak it. Everything changes, you can answer for nothing, promise nothing; nothing is your own, and your heart is still less your own than anything else. It is astonishing how this childish state abases the

proud heart, and destroys the wisdom which had seemed so firm. Speak then of unselfishness, of kindness, of generosity, of constancy, of gratitude to one's friends, and it is like speaking of music and dancing to a dying man.

But wait till the winter has passed, wait till God has destroyed all that must thus die in the soul, and then will the spring-time brighten all. God restores even friendship, with all his other gifts, an hundredfold. Love for our true friends returns as strongly as ever ; but now we no longer love them for ourselves, and in self ; we love them only for God and in God, with a deep, tender love, full of sweetness and sensitiveness ; for God knows well how to purify our sensitiveness. It is not sensitiveness, but self-love, that corrupts our affection. And now we indulge without scruple in this purified affection, for it is God Himself who points it out to us. We love through Him, and without looking aside from Him ; it is He whom we seek in all that He gives us to love.

In this resurrection of friendship there is no self-interest or self-contemplation ; we can see

defects in those whom we love, and the defects in their affection for us, without being repulsed thereby.

Before God has thus purified our hearts, even the most religious people are fanciful, jealous, easily offended by their best friends; because self-love always fears to lose anything, and always looks for gain, even in that interchange of feeling which may seem to be the most generous and disinterested. If it does not seek for honour or worldly advantages, still it seeks for consolation, and for that rest to the heart which is the sweetest pleasure of this life. Remove this enjoyment, disturb that interchange of friendship which appeared so pure, and self-love is instantly wounded; it is self-love which complains, seeks for pity, grows angry, distracts the heart. But when it is God whom we desire in all things, we love firmly and deeply; and yet if that friendship is interrupted by the will of God, we remain in peace. We have lost nothing, for we had nothing to lose, seeing we had already lost self. If we grieve, it is on behalf of those we love, lest

the rupture should in any way prove injurious to them. Our sorrow may be acute, for affection is always sensitive ; but that sorrow is full of peace, since it is free from the troubles of self-interest.

There is another difference to be observed regarding this change in the nature of our friendship. So long as we remain our own, we can love nothing but for our own sakes ; and the man who is wrapped up in self can feel only such affection as is bounded by his own capacity ; therefore, such a heart is limited in all its feelings, and the greatest human generosity must remain narrowed at some point. But those souls who come out of themselves, and who truly forget themselves in God, feel affection which partakes of His nature through whom they love ; they love without measure, without end, because God, who is infinite Love, loves in them.

Such was the feeling of the Apostles, which St. Paul so truly expresses. He feels everything with pure and unmeasured vividness ; he bears in his heart the care of all the Churches ; he rejoices, he grieves, he is angered, he is touched with

sympathy, his heart seems besieged by every strongest emotion. He is abased, and he is exalted; he speaks with all the authority of a father, and with all the tenderness of a mother. He loves with a jealous love; he would even desire to be accursed for his brethren's sake. All these feelings are engraven in his heart; and it is even thus that God teaches us to love, when we love self no longer.

XV.

*CONCERNING OUR NATURAL DREAD OF
PRIVATIONS.*

NEARLY all those who desire to serve God, desire it for their own sakes. They hope to gain all, and to lose nothing ; to receive consolation, not to suffer ; to possess gifts, not to bear privations ; to be made great, never to be brought low. On the contrary, the inward life progresses through loss, through sacrifice, through abasement, through being so stripped of all as to hold by God alone. When God deprives us of those first perceptible enjoyments, which are as the milk of babes, we think that all is lost. This shows us to be clinging too much to the means of His grace, mistaking them for the ends ; and that we are seeking them still for our own sakes. Privations are the strong meat which fortifies the

soul, tearing it from itself, binding it more closely to God; yet we are in despair so soon as that work is commenced. We judge all to be lost, just when all is really beginning to be established and purified. We desire truly that God should make of us what He pleases, provided He pleases to make something great and perfect; but we are unwilling enough to be abased, to become as nothing. We cannot consent to be the burnt-offering of which nothing shall remain, of which the whole shall be consumed by Divine fire. We will gladly learn the purest faith, but we must keep our own wisdom. We will be childlike, but we must continue great in our own eyes. What imaginary holiness!

XVI.

AGAINST CLINGING TO THE SENSIBLE ENJOYMENTS OF GRACE.

THOSE who are devoted to God only so long as they taste the pleasures and consolations of His grace, resemble the multitude who followed Jesus Christ, not for the sake of His doctrine, but because they ate of the loaves which He miraculously provided. They say with St. Peter, '*Lord, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles.*'¹ But they know not what they say. They are intoxicated with the sweetness of Tabor, yet they despise the Son of God, and refuse to follow Him to Calvary. Is this dying to self? Are these the just of whom St. Paul has said that they '*shall live by faith*'?

Such persons desire to have the unusual en-

¹ St. Mark ix. 5.

lightenment which shall be the mark of God's peculiar favour, and of special communication with Him ; for nothing is more flattering to self. They would see His brightness, discern His will for others, be considered something quite exceptional ; little by little there may arise a secret ambition for all these things.

But the Apostle '*shows to us a more excellent way.*'¹ That which he would have us covet earnestly is '*charity, which seeketh not her own.*' Charity does not desire to adorn herself, but rather to give up all. It is not her own pleasure that she seeks, but God, whose will alone she would perform. The soul who, in her tender infancy, God has nourished with milk, must suffer herself to be weaned so soon as He will feed her with the *meat which belongs to them that are of full age.*²

How would it be for us if we were always children, always fed with the sweetness of Divine consolation ? The first joys of religion were good, they detached us from the pleasures of the

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 31.

² Heb. v. 13.

world, they drew us to purer delights, they accustomed us to a life of prayer and devotion ; but the continuance of joy so delicious as to take away all perception of the cross we must bear, living always as though Heaven were already open to us, would not be dying with Christ, it would not be the destruction of self.

When we learn to hold by God alone, in pure and simple faith, receiving the consolations He bestows on us, but not stopping at them ; never reasoning, but always obeying, following ever the light of faith as it is revealed to us—then are we being led onwards in the safest path.

Experience will soon prove to us, better than anything else could do, how far more excellent is this way than any enjoyment of special gifts. Whosoever will try this path of simple faith, following it in all things, will find that it contains the truest and the most complete mortification of self. My God ! where are those souls who pause not on this road ? Yet it is they who are faithful unto death, that shall *receive a crown of life.*

XVII.

*ON DRYNESS IN PRAYER, AND CONCERNING
DISTRACTIONS.*

WE are tempted to believe that we no longer pray truly so soon as we cease to feel a certain pleasure in our prayer. In order to undeceive ourselves, let us remember that perfect prayer, and love to God, are one and the same thing.

Prayer does not consist in sensible enjoyment, nor in the charm of a vivid imagination ; nor does it consist in a certain enlightenment of the mind, which enables us to apprehend the sublime truths of God ; nor even in the comfort which may arise from the thought of Him. Love may still exist, and in even the greater purity, when deprived of all these things. They are but the gifts of God ; without them we may depend the more entirely on Himself alone. Such is the purest love of

faith, from which nature shrinks so sorely. It leaves her no support ; and she feels that all is lost by the very means through which all is gained.

Pure love exists simply in the will ; therefore it is not a love of sentiment : imagination has no part in it. It is a love which can love without feeling, just as true faith can believe without seeing. We need not fear lest such love should be imaginary, for nothing is more distinct from imagination than the will. Then does love become pure, when we love God for Himself, not for the sake of that which He enables us to feel ; we follow Him, but not on account of the loaves which He multiplies for us.

What, then, it may be asked, does piety consist only in the will to be united to God ? Is not this making it a mere thought or an idea, rather than a living principle ? I would reply that if such a will is not proved by faithfulness, at least in the generality of matters, I should not believe it to be true, for *the good tree brings forth good fruit* ; and such a will must necessarily be watchful in accomplishing the commands of God. It is compatible,

however, in this life with many frailties, which God still permits to exist in the soul for its humiliation. If therefore we experience only such daily infirmities, let us feel humbled, but not discouraged.

Most certainly, true virtue and true love exist only in the will. And is it not already much if we always desire the highest good so soon as we perceive it, and if we turn towards it deliberately so soon as we find ourselves departing from it—if we desire nothing but according to God's will, and continue in a spirit of self-sacrifice, and of full surrender to Him, even when we have no perceptible consolation? Do you count as nothing the constant checking of all the unquiet reflections of self-love, the pressing forwards, not knowing whither, yet without hesitation; the never thinking voluntarily of self, or only so thinking of oneself as one might do of some other person, and in order to fulfil the duty appointed for the present moment without looking forwards? Is it not thus that the old man may be destroyed in us far more truly than by all those good works which bring honour to ourselves, or tend to our own advancement?

It is a kind of faithlessness which makes us always so anxious to assure ourselves that we have done well ; we need not wish to know what we have done, for often it pleases God to hide it from us ; moreover, it is like amusing ourselves on our journey by arguing about the road. The best road, and the shortest, is to renounce self, to forget, to abandon it, to think only of obeying God. All religion consists in so coming out of self as to direct our steps towards God.

As regards involuntary distractions, they do not interfere with love ; for love is in the will, and the will can have no distractions if it desires to have none. So soon as we perceive distractions of thought, let us drop them, and turn back to God. Thus, whilst we sleep, our heart waketh ; love does not relax. An affectionate father is not always consciously thinking about his son ; a thousand matters may engage his attention, yet these distractions do not interfere with his paternal love. At each moment that any thought of his son occurs to his mind, he loves him ; he feels from the very depth of his heart that he has never ceased to love him, although he may have been hindered

from thinking about him. And such should be our love for God—a simple love, free from anxiety or distrust.

If our imagination wanders, if our mind is occupied, we need not be disquieted ; these matters do not affect the true spirit, '*the hidden man of the heart*,' of whom St. Peter says that it is incorruptible ; even a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. What we have to do is to make good use of our thoughts, which are at liberty, by turning them always to the presence of the Well-Beloved ; and we need not distress ourselves about the others. It is for God to increase, when it pleases Him to do so, the facility of retaining the consciousness of His presence. Often He withdraws it from us for our own advancement, that He may teach us to live the more truly by faith alone.

We ask impatiently for perceptible consolation, we fear lest we have lost it because our repentance is not deep enough. Ah ! why do we not prove our repentance by our willingness to give up the comfort which we are so earnestly desiring ? Let us remember Jesus Christ, forsaken on the cross

by His Father. God withdrew from Him all feeling of consolation : He hid Himself from Jesus. That was the last blow with which the hand of God smote the Man of Sorrows : thus was the sacrifice completed. Never should we more entirely abandon ourselves to God than when He appears to forsake us. Let us accept the light of His consolation when He bestows it upon us, but let us not cling to our enjoyment thereof ; and when He plunges us into darkness, let us accept the darkness, and suffer, in love, that agony. One moment is worth a thousand at such times : we are miserable, yet may we be in peace : God has hidden His face, but He has also hidden us from ourselves, that we may learn to abide by faith alone. We feel discouraged, yet our will is determined, immovably, to accept what God pleases, however severe it may be. We accept all, we desire all, even the misery by which we are overwhelmed. Thus are we secretly at peace in the midst of all tribulation. Blessed be God, who doeth in us great things, notwithstanding our unworthiness.

XVIII.

HOW WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED OR DISCOURAGED, EITHER BY OUR OWN FAULTS, OR BY THE FAULTS OF OTHERS.

WE have not sufficiently sounded the depths either of human misery in general, or of our own in particular, so long as we are still surprised at the weakness and corruption of men. Our astonishment arises from the mistake of supposing that humanity itself is capable of any good ; whereas it is capable of nothing, and worse than nothing. Why should we be surprised that the tree yields its own fruit ? Rather let us glorify Jesus Christ, in whom we are grafted, when we, who are but wild olive-trees by nature, bear through Him, instead of our own bitter fruits, the sweet fruits of holiness.

Put away from you all idea of human virtue,

which is but the poison of self-complacency and self-confidence. *‘That which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God.’*¹ Such esteem is a constant inward idolatry. Though it be clothed with specious virtues, yet is this idolatry more hateful than many sins which we think terrible. There is but one true way of judging, and that is, to judge as God judgeth. In God’s sight many an odious crime, committed through infirmity, in anger, or in ignorance, is less criminal than the very virtues practised by one who is full of self, and who refers all to his own excellence as to a divinity ; for this is completely reversing the very design of God in creation. Let us, then, cease to judge of virtues or of vices by our own tastes, depraved as they are by self-love ; or by our own false standard of greatness. There can be nothing great that does not become insignificant indeed in the presence of the only sovereign Greatness. You naturally long to be great ; the tendency of your heart, and also the indulgence of long habit, cause you to desire it ; but God sees fit

¹ St. Luke xvi. 15.

to lower you. He would make you childlike in His hands. Suffer Him thus to deal with you.

Many who truly desire to serve God are nevertheless full of imperfections. Not that God authorises these imperfections, but because their imperfections hinder them, by preventing them from going straight to God in the shortest way. They cannot make rapid progress so long as they are heavily burdened with self, and with all the superfluous weight which they so eagerly and jealously insist on carrying for themselves. The perfection of piety, which consists of pure faith and dying to self, appears to them too high and impracticable to be reached. Well, then; they must needs remain in that self-love which can but fear God, and which will oblige them to go on falling, and timidly recovering themselves, to the very end of their lives. Whilst they love self so dearly, they cannot but be full of failures.

People grow afraid when they find that religion would carry them so far. Few have sufficient courage and faith to leave go of self, to forget self, to suffer self to be destroyed. Consequently,

there are but few who do real honour to religion.

There are certain faults of hastiness and infirmity with which you can easily sympathise ; you understand that they are compatible with sincere piety. But you do not perceive with equal clearness that there are other faults which arise from weakness, from miscomprehension, from self-love, and from mere habit, which may also co-exist with a sincere intention of pleasing God. True, this intention is neither sufficiently pure nor sufficiently strong ; but, though weak and imperfect, it may be sincere so far as it goes. People may be avaricious without perceiving their avarice ; they call it a proper carefulness, a desire to waste nothing, foresight against future need. People may be envious, but this low passion is able so to disguise itself as to deceive those who are tormented by it, far more than it can deceive others who are looking on with critical eyes. Many people are harsh, over-particular, difficult to deal with, easily provoked in matters of business ; and it is self-interest which makes them so ; but that

self-interest clothes itself in the most plausible manner. In fact, most people, especially rich people, and yourself amongst the number, have many imperfections mingled with their best desires ; because the will, though good so far as it goes, is as yet but weak and divided, and because they are hindered by the secret promptings of self-love.

It appears to me that you need to enlarge your heart concerning the faults of others. I grant that you cannot help seeing them when they force themselves on your notice, nor can you avoid noticing the low principles which actuate many people. Neither can you avoid feeling the pain which these things must cause you. But you can bear this patiently ; you can avoid judging those things which must be uncertain, and, also, you can prevent yourself from being repulsed by those who annoy you.

Perfection bears easily with the imperfections of others. We should, moreover, accustom ourselves to seeing quietly even the gravest faults in those who are well disposed, waiting patiently till God shall remove them little by little.

And, besides, such people are, no doubt, striving to correct themselves, so far as they are each able, and you should strive to support them in their weakness. You must surely understand, from your own experience in such matters, how difficult is this correction. You have felt its bitterness; remember how you should soften it to others. Your eagerness against the faults of others is in itself a very grave fault. Disdain of others arises from a want of self-knowledge. It is pride which lifts itself above the rest of human nature, instead of which, to obtain a true view, you must regard it from the same level. Alas! when will you perceive that there is nothing either in yourself or in anyone else? In God all is perfect goodness; in the creature all is evil.

You fear lest you should despise the whole human race. Well; in one sense I would have you wholly despise it, so far as it is contemptible. Only the light of God, growing within you, can enable you truly to penetrate the depth of evil that exists in all mankind. But, in looking at the evil, you must recognise also the good which God

plants amongst it. It is this mixture of good and evil which it is so difficult to realise. The enemy has mixed tares with the wheat. The servants would fain separate them; but the Master saith, '*Let both grow together until the harvest.*'

Moreover, if others are weak, is that a reason for being impatient with them? You who complain that others cause you suffering, do you make no one suffer? You who are so shocked at the faults of others, do you imagine yourself to be perfect? God who knows all, and who knows all your sins against Him, could not He with one word bring you to confusion? Does it never occur to you to fear that He may inquire why you have not shown to your brethren something of that tender mercy which He, who is your Master, shows so unceasingly towards you?

Do not, then, allow yourself to be repulsed by the faults of others, or to become distrustful. Many things may severely try your patience, your confidence, your charity, and may greatly weary them; but fear not, God has reserved to Himself many true worshippers. It is certain they do not

do what they should do ; yet they do a great deal, considering the corrupt state of the world, and considering also the weakness of their nature. They recognise their own infirmities, they are humbled by them, they struggle against them ; it is true that they correct themselves slowly, but still they do correct themselves. And they praise God for all they succeed in doing, blaming themselves for all their failures. God is satisfied with this ; be satisfied also.

If you feel as I feel, that God should be served more worthily, aspire fully your own self to reach that degree of holiness in which they who are truly His seek nothing for their own sakes, and where all selfishness is banished as a matter of infidelity to Him. Ah ! if you had but arrived at that blessed state, so far from feeling impatiently towards others who have not reached it also, the enlargement of your heart would give you the tenderest sympathy for those who are hindered by the withering effects of self-interest. For the nearer we approach to perfection, the more patient we become with imperfection. It was the Pha-

risees who would not bear with publicans and sinners; Jesus Christ bore with them in gentleness and love. And so soon as we truly let go of self, we enter into that greatness of soul in Him which nothing can weary or discourage.

XIX.

IN WHAT DOES THE TRUE LIBERTY OF GOD'S CHILDREN CONSIST, AND ON THE MEANS OF ATTAINING IT.

I BELIEVE that liberty of heart must be full of simplicity. It is when we cease looking restlessly back upon ourselves that we begin to be truly free. False wisdom, on the contrary, is always on the stretch, always occupied with herself, always jealous for her own perfection; therefore she suffers the keenest distress every time she perceives the slightest blemish in herself.

He who is simple in heart, and free from self, does not aim the less at perfection; he presses forward, on the contrary, more steadily. For the fault from which all our other faults arise is the love of self, which causes us to refer all we do to ourselves, instead of to God. Whoso, therefore,

will aim truly at giving up self, forgetting, denying himself, according to the precept of Jesus Christ, will strike at the very root of all his faults, and will find in this self-renunciation the germ of all other virtues.

Then do we begin to understand and experience within us the deep truth of those words, '*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*'¹ We then neglect nothing, in order that God may reign within our hearts; yet are we in peace even in the midst of the humiliations caused by our faults. We would die rather than commit the slightest sin voluntarily, but we care not for the judgments of men; or, if we care, it is only lest we should cause others to offend. We are willing to accept scorn for Christ's sake; and we look peacefully on all the changes that surround us. The truer our self-renunciation, the deeper our peace; so free does the heart become that we are ready for all; we desire all that God pleases, and we would wish for nothing else; we are as simple as little children.

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 17.

The light of God discovers to us even our smallest sins ; but we are not thereby discouraged. We walk before Him. If we deviate in the least from our path, we hasten to regain our steps, and think only of pressing onwards the more earnestly. Oh how blessed is this simplicity, but how few have courage thus to press forwards without looking behind them ! Be free, '*with the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.*'¹ Be free, since to freedom the Saviour calleth you ; only *use not this liberty for an occasion of offence.*

True watchfulness consists in obeying God in all things, in following the light by which He reveals to us each duty, making it our principle not only to please God in all things, but trying always in each instance to do that which will please Him the best. Let us not stop to argue with ourselves about the difference between great sins and little sins, imperfections and graver offences. No doubt a considerable difference exists in such matters. Nevertheless there should be, practically, none for that soul who has deter-

¹ Gal. v. 1.

mined to withhold from God nothing that it is possible to give. It is in this sense that '*the law is not made for the righteous.*'¹ The children of God have a higher motive than any law of constraint, even that of pleasing Him, '*for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*'² As St. Augustine has so truly said, '*Love—and when once you love you may do what you please.*'

If this sincere desire to do in everything that which is the most pleasing in God's sight be carried out cheerfully, without being discouraged when we have failed, but beginning afresh over and over again; trusting always as regards the end; bearing with ourselves in our infirmities because God bears with us; we shall wait patiently for the time appointed for our perfect deliverance. Meanwhile we shall walk in all simplicity along the road that is pointed out; wasting no time in looking back, but '*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we shall press toward the mark*

¹ 1 Tim. i. 9.

² Rom. x. 4.

for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'¹ And thus shall we gain true liberty.

I urge you with all my heart to aspire to it ; let watchfulness and liberty go hand in hand ; lean on God in all confidence, and from the depth of your heart. Give yourself up to the grace by which at any time He draws you the more closely to Himself. Fear not to lose sight of your own self, look only to Him, come as close to Him as He will enable you to do. Do not hesitate ; plunge deeply into the ocean of His Love ; too happy if you may be so lost therein as to find yourself no more.

¹ Phil. iii. 13, 14.

XX.

*ON THE HAPPINESS OF GIVING ONESELF WHOLLY
TO GOD.—HOW HIS LOVE SWEETENS EVERY
SACRIFICE.*

CHRISTIAN perfection is by no means the state of wearisome constraint that many people imagine. It demands that we should belong to God from the very depth of our hearts ; but as soon as we thus belong to Him, all that we do for Him becomes easy. God's children are always satisfied when their love is undivided ; for they desire all that God pleases, and they long to do for Him whatever He would have done. They forsake all, and thereby receive a hundredfold. Peace, liberty of heart, the sweetness of abandoning oneself wholly to God, and of resting in His hands ; the joy of seeing His light ever growing within one's heart ; freedom from the tyrannical constraints

and motives of the age in which we live ; all these things constitute the abundant happiness of God's children, even in the midst of their troubles.

Blessed is he who thus yields himself to God ! then is he freed from his own passions, from the judgments of other men, from their unkindness and the hardness of their maxims, from their coldness and their scorn ; he is freed from all the miseries that arise through the briefness of life and the apprehensions of death. What folly ! to fear giving oneself to God, or to fear making too much progress in so happy a condition.

Blessed is he who, with closed eyes, casts himself unreservedly into the arms of the '*Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.*'¹ Then do we desire to know nothing except that which we owe to God, and our only fear is lest we should not sufficiently perceive whatever He may demand. The true Christian, whatever misfortunes befall him, desires all that God wills for him ; he wishes for nothing that is denied. The more he loves God the happier he is ; and the

¹ 2 Cor. i. 3.

highest degree of perfection, so far from increasing his burden, renders his yoke more light and easy.

What madness to be afraid of belonging too fully to God ! It is fearing to be too happy ; it is fearing to love His will in all things ; it is fearing to become too courageous in bearing that cross which must be allotted to us ; to have too much of the consolation of God's love, too much freedom from the miseries of human passions.

Jesus Christ says to every Christian, without exception, '*If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*'¹ The broad road leadeth to destruction ; it is the narrow way, into which so few enter, that we must follow. We must be born again, and become as little children ; we must deny ourselves, hate our own selves ; we must become poor in spirit ; we must weep now *that our sorrow may be turned into joy* ; we may not be of the world, '*for we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.*'² These truths frighten many who know something of what religion demands, yet know nothing of the

¹ St. Matt. xvi. 24.

² 1 St. John v. 19.

spirit of love which makes all so easy. They know not that the road which leads to perfection is a way of peace, they know nothing of the love which sweetens all labour.

Happy are they who belong to their Lord with an undivided heart. It is they who find *His yoke easy and His burden light*; it is they who find *rest to their souls*; who learn how sweetly He comforteth *the weary and the heavy-laden*. But woe to the cowardly souls who are divided between God and mammon. They will, and they will not; they are at the same time torn by their passion and by their remorse. They fear both the judgments of God and the judgments of men. They fear evil, yet they are ashamed of that which is good. They have all the troubles of religion, and none of its consolations. Ah! if they had but courage to despise the vain pursuits of men, the coldness of their scorn, and the rashness of their censure, what peace might they not enjoy in the bosom of their God!

Those who fear to see too clearly what God's love demands, are but mocking themselves if they fancy that they love Him. There is but one way

of loving God, and this is to make no bargain with Him, but to follow with a generous heart all that He suggests to us. They who would sacrifice a little, and yet belong a little to the world, run great risk of being found amongst those of whom God has said, '*So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*'¹ God will not continue to bear patiently with those cowardly souls who say within themselves: Thus far will I go and no farther. What would a king say of the subject, or a master of the servant, who would insist on serving him only after his own fashion? who should fear to become affectionately bound to his interests, or be ashamed to show, publicly, any attachment to his cause? But what, then, shall the King of kings say to those amongst us who would thus behave towards Him?

We must study not only the will of God in general, but also what is His will for us in each matter, in order to find out how we may the most perfectly please Him. We are truly reasonable only when we so consult the will of God as to

¹ Rev. iii. 16.

conform our own to His: this is the true light that we should follow; all other lights are false. They who think themselves to be wise are but blind, if their wisdom be not the wisdom of Christ, for He alone is worthy of the name of wisdom. They are as those who, whilst dreaming, believe themselves to be awake, and imagine that the objects they see in their dreams are real. Thus are the mighty ones of this earth deluded; the children of God, and they only, walk by the light of pure truth. And what have those men before them whose hearts are set on the vanities and ambitions of the world? Often disgrace, always death; and after death, Judgment and Eternity. These are the true objects which are still drawing near; but the worldly perceive them not. Their wise policy foresees everything—except the miserable and utter failure of all that they are seeking. O blind in your own conceits! when will you open your eyes to the light of Jesus Christ, which alone can reveal to you the emptiness of all worldly honours?

But they who abandon themselves to God find

all in Him. They no longer seek anything for themselves, yet everything is theirs ; for '*all things work together for good to them that love God,*'¹ . . . to those '*who are led by His Spirit.*' They who are deprived of this blessing either do not ask for it, or ask amiss. It is not by the words of our lips, or by external actions ; it is by the longing of the heart, by the deep humiliation of our souls before God, that we obtain within us that gift of the Spirit of life without which the best actions are but dead. '*If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead, because of sin ; but the Spirit is life, because of righteousness.*'² God is so good ; He only awaits our true desire to give us abundantly of that gift which is Himself. Before they cry unto Me, He says, even so soon as the desire is formed in the heart, before the prayer is uttered, '*I will answer ; and, while they are yet speaking, I will hear.*'³ It is the prayer of the heart to which God thus replies.

¹ Romans viii. 28.

² Romans viii. 9, 10.

Isa. lxxv. 24.

In beholding God we see the nothingness of this world ; its grandeur vanishes as a dream. Every mountain shall be brought low, every proud head bent, before the glorious weight of the eternal majesty of God. In the day when He shall arise to judge the world, with one glance will He destroy all that has appeared brilliant in our present darkness, as the sun, when it rises, extinguishes the stars. We shall behold God alone in all things ; there will be none beside Him ; He will fill all. What has become, will it be asked, of those objects which appeared to us so full of fascination ? Where have they vanished ? What were they ? Alas ! not even their traces will be left to show where they had been. They will have passed as a shadow before the sun ; scarcely will it be true that they had ever existed, so entirely will they have appeared but for a little while, and then vanished from our sight. Blessed are they, and only they, who can already discern this emptiness, through the light of Jesus Christ.

XXI.

*PRAYER FOR ONE WHO DESIRES TO BE FULLY
SURRENDERED TO GOD.*

MY GOD, I desire to give myself wholly to Thee; grant me courage to be Thine alone; strengthen my feeble will, which longeth after Thee. I stretch forth mine arms to Thee; take me. If I have no strength to follow Thee, attract me by the sweetness of Thy grace; draw me after Thee by the cords of love. What am I, Lord, unless I be Thine? It is slavery to be bound to myself and to my own passions. O true liberty of the children of God! the world knoweth thee not. Happy, most happy is he who dependeth on God, and on God alone.

O heavenly Bridegroom of the soul! how is it that we fear to break the chain of our slavery? Can we be afraid to give ourselves unto Thee?

Do we fear our own happiness ? Shall we hunger after the flesh-pots of Egypt, and fear to enter the promised land ?

It is not I who give myself to Thee ; it is Thou, O Love, who givest Thyself to me. What joy to be alone—alone with Thee—to hear nothing else, hearkening only to Thee. O infinite Wisdom, are not Thy words far sweeter than the words of men ? Thou wilt speak to me, Thou wilt teach me, Thou wilt nourish me with Thine own self. Lord, when I consider Thy yoke, it seems to me all too light ; and is this the cross that I am to bear after Thee all the days of my life ? Hast Thou no bitter cup, no cup of Thy sufferings, which Thou wilt teach me to drink ? O Love, Thou art all love ; shall I fear to draw close to Thee ?

How great is my unworthiness ! Thy mercy alone can be yet greater. But the less wisdom or strength I have, the more do I need Thy compassion. O God, I am utterly unfit for Thee, yet may I become a miracle of Thy love. Give all that is lacking to me ; then my unworthiness shall but exalt the mightiness of Thy grace.

XXII.

*ON THE NECESSITY OF SELF-RENUNCIATION,
AND CONCERNING ITS PRACTICE.*

IF you would understand truly what is self-renunciation, you have but to remember the difficulty which you felt, and very naturally expressed, when I told you that we must count as nothing that 'I' which is so dear to every one of us. To renounce self is to count oneself as nothing; and whoever has so attempted this as to find out the difficulty understands already what is the meaning of that renunciation to which our nature is so keenly opposed. Since the blow has struck home it has reached the evil of your heart; and now you have only to suffer the all-powerful hand of God to work within you. He will find the means of tearing you from yourself.

The deepest evil of our hearts is our blind self-

love, which even amounts to idolatry. All that we love we love only for our own sakes. Even in friendship, when we seek no worldly interest, we seek another gain, which, though it may be more secret, more delicate, more worthy in the sight of others, is therefore but the more dangerous, and more likely to act as a poison by nourishing our self-love. For what is there sweeter or more flattering to the most refined sense of self-love than to be praised as one who is free from self?

There are some who appear to live entirely for others, who are the delight of many hearts, who are gentle, who seem wholly unselfish ; for so great is true forgetfulness of self that self-love would fain imitate it, and finds no honour so sweet as that of appearing to seek for none. This unselfishness, which, were it a true and living principle, would be the very death of the old nature, is, on the contrary, the most refined and imperceptible nourishment to a pride which disdains other means of exaltation, and would tread coarser vanities beneath its feet. It is no difficult matter, however, to unmask this modest pride, though from no

point of view may it look like pride, so carefully does it seem to have renounced all that is most flattering to others. But if it be blamed, it bears blame impatiently. If those whom it loves and befriends do not repay it with friendship, confidence, and esteem, it is wounded to the very quick. You perceive, therefore, that it is by no means disinterested, though striving to appear so. It insists on being well paid, and is hungry for the esteem of good men ; it would love in order to obtain love—that all may admire its disinterestedness. It only appears to forget self in order that it may the better occupy others with itself.

In proportion as we learn to observe what things most easily distress or flatter our natures, we shall perceive of what kind is our pride ; whether stronger or more delicate, for it may be of many different degrees. But pride, by whatever name you may call it, is still pride ; and that which appears in the most reasonable form may be the most odious in its tendency ; for, in esteeming itself, it is the more apt to despise others.

Only the love of God can draw us away from

ourselves. Except His all-powerful hand sustain us, we have no point on which we can stand, to enable us to take one step out of ourselves. There is no medium ; either we bring all to God, or we bring all to ourselves. If we refer all to ourselves, self is our god. If, on the contrary, we refer all to God, then, and then only, we are in our true position. To accomplish His will becomes our only interest ; and herein consists that true renunciation of self which you desire to understand.

But nothing will more effectually check this grace in our hearts than a certain philosophical pride, or that apparent generosity which is in truth only disguised self-love. If therefore we are naturally frank, disinterested, and inclined to do good to others for our own pleasure, we should be so much the more careful that we really renounce self, and that we do not rest satisfied with the possession of these natural advantages.

The reason that no created object can really draw us out of ourselves is that there exists none which is sufficiently deserving of such preference. There is none that is perfect enough so to secure

our attachment as to prevent us from falling back on self, or that can satisfy our hearts by such attachment. God, and God alone, can do two things; He is able so to reveal Himself to us as to claim the most absolute right over our whole being, and then, at the same time, He engages our affections by the perfect charm of His goodness. There is also another wonder which God performs, namely, that after He has thus enlightened our hearts, He also works in them as He pleases. It is not enough that He shows us His love; He also makes Himself loved by reproducing through His grace His own love in our hearts. Thus does He Himself perform within us all that He requires; *'for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'*¹

You will wish, perhaps, that I should explain to you more distinctly in what details this self-renunciation must be carried out; and I will try to satisfy you.

It is very easy to understand that criminal pleasures and worldly vanities should be given up,

¹ Phil. ii. 13.

because the renunciation of such things necessarily arises from the contempt we feel for them ; so that we cannot but cast them from us with horror. But it is not so easy to understand how we are to renounce the good things that we rightly possess ; the peaceful happiness of an honest and simple life, the honour which arises from good reputation, and even those virtues which excite no malicious envy.

It is the more difficult to understand how these things are to be renounced, because we are evidently not intended to cast them from us with horror, but rather to make a proper use of them according to that state of life to which Providence has called us. We may need the consolation of a quiet and peaceful life to enable us to bear other troubles which are appointed for us ; we must have regard to such honour as concerns our duties ; we must keep for our necessary use the goods which we possess. How, then, are we to renounce these things, and at the same time to use them ? By using them in quietness and moderation, not suffering our hearts to cling to them. We must use them soberly ; for if we do not suffer ourselves

to become eagerly attached to anything, or to seek our happiness in it, we derive from it only that which it is intended to yield us. Therefore, the way to renounce that which is evil is to cast it from us with horror ; and the way to renounce that which is good is to use it only with moderation, and to supply our necessities, striving the while to check all those imaginary needs which, naturally, we are so apt to encourage.

Observe that it is not only evil things that we are to renounce, but also good things ; for Jesus Christ has said, and without the slightest restriction, *'If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'*¹ Every Christian, therefore, must give up all, even the most innocent things, else they will cease to be innocent for him. He must renounce even those things which it is his duty to guard the most carefully, such as the good of his family, or his own honour ; not only must he use these things quietly and in moderation, but he

¹ St. Luke xiv. 26.

must also hold himself in readiness to give them up at any time, if it should so please God.

He must renounce even those friends whom he loves best, and whom it is his duty to love ; and this is the manner in which he must renounce them. He must love them only in God ; he must accept the comfort of their affection, but he must be ready to lose it when God takes it away ; and he must not suffer his heart to rest on them. Herein is the true chastity of Christian love, which seeks only the heavenly Bridegroom in every mortal friend. Thus may we '*use this world as not abusing it.*'¹ We use it, but with that reticence of heart which reserves itself for a higher object. It is in this sense that Our Lord would have us leave *father and mother, brethren and sisters, and all that we have.*

God is a jealous God. If we cling in the depth of our hearts to any created being, we are '*not worthy of Him.*'² He rejects such love, as a husband will reject the love that is divided between himself and a stranger. '*Turn, O back-*

¹ 1 Cor vii. 31.

² St. Matt. x. 37.

*sliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you ; . . . return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.' 'Behold, we come unto Thee ; for Thou art the Lord our God.'*¹

After having renounced all that surrounds us, we come to the last sacrifice, namely, of ourselves, and of all that is within us. '*We must present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service.*'² This renunciation of our bodies seems impossible to many. Some foolish people fancy, or seem to fancy, that no part of themselves is more important than the bodies which they pamper so luxuriously, and adorn with so much care. Even many of those who have given up studying the outward adornment of their persons, retain a love for their bodies which leads to a most shameful cowardice, and which causes them to shudder at the very name of death.

Others may find greater difficulty in renouncing their spirit. The more our natural courage may lead us to despise cowardly fear concerning our bodies, the more tempted we may be to value too

¹ Jer. iii. 14-22.

² Romans xii. 1.

highly those mental gifts which seem part of ourselves. We love to consider ourselves wise, discreet, free from the vanities into which others fall. But we are sadly lacking towards God if we yield our hearts to this refinement of self-love. Whosoever regards any of God's gifts with self-complacency, turns that gift at once into poison. Appropriate nothing to yourself; neither external treasures, nor your talents, nor even the most spiritual blessings. Your good-will is a free gift that comes from God alone, as truly as your life comes from Him. All that is within you is His; use it as lent to you by Him, and according to the intention of the Lender; but never dispose of any of His goods as though they were your own. This simple spirit of disappropriation is the only thing we can truly possess; and in thus using all that we have in following only the indications of God's will, consists true self-renunciation.

You will ask me to tell you more exactly in what way the practice of such renunciation is to be carried out. But to this I can reply that no sooner is this desire established in the very depth of your

will, than God Himself will conduct your soul in all things, leading you, as it were, by the hand ; and will practise you in this renunciation in every daily opportunity.

It is not by overstrained reflections or by continual effort that we can deny self ; it is simply by abstaining from seeking our own will until we lose ourselves in God.

Whenever thoughts of vanity, or of self-satisfaction, or self-confidence, any desire of pleasing self, or any feelings of impatience towards others, or with the troubles of our condition, arise in our hearts, we have but to let these things drop from us, as one may drop a pebble to the bottom of a river, turning back to God, and waiting till we are once more in the right position towards Him before we venture to act further.

If, in your haste, words have escaped from you which you feel to have arisen from any of the feelings of which we have been speaking, do not be discouraged ; press onwards, bearing patiently, in God's sight, the humiliation which your fault causes you ; and do not suffer yourself to be hin-

dered by the stings of self-love. Go on your way trustfully, and have nothing to do with that sensitive pride which cannot bear the sight of its own imperfections. Thus will your very fault serve to mortify self in you, teaching you to become as nothing in God's sight. Give yourself up again at once and unreservedly to the leadings of God's Spirit in your heart, lest they should be in any degree checked by this passing interruption.

The great thing is to give up your own wisdom, and to act in all things with simplicity. Be ready to sacrifice the favour of others, public esteem or approval, whenever the conduct which God requires from you makes it necessary. Not that you need meddle with things He does not call on you to do, or commit yourself by speaking uselessly of truths which others (though they may be well disposed) are not yet able to comprehend. We must follow God—never attempt to go before Him ; but so soon as He gives the sign, leave all and venture all in following. To hesitate, to delay, to be scrupulous, weakening the effect of what He gives us to do by our selfish fear of con-

sequences, wishing to shelter ourselves from the annoyances and contradictions we may meet with, seeking for plausible excuses in hopes of evading some difficult or painful duty, though we are convinced in our own hearts that God requires it of us, and has placed us in the right position for accomplishing it,—all this is to take ourselves back again after we have once given ourselves unreservedly to God. I entreat you never to be thus unfaithful. Nothing is so terrible as to resist the inward leading of God's Holy Spirit.

All other faults, which you may commit in spite of your best intentions, may be made to work for good to you, by humbling you, and making you little in your own eyes. But the sin of resisting the Holy Spirit through pride and worldly wisdom, striving to spare yourself in accomplishing the work which God gives you to do, would gradually quench His grace in your heart.

God has given you a candid and ingenuous nature, and on this foundation He will build up His work in you. He would have from you an entire simplicity, which shall be the more truly His

wisdom because it is not in the least your own. He would have you little in your own eyes, and supple in His hands. It is this childlike simplicity, so contrary to the wisdom of man, but so earnestly enjoined in the Bible, that God would instil into your heart, though the world may despise and misunderstand it.

Provided you are faithful in reserving to yourself, from the rest of the day, sufficient time for nourishing your heart by communion with God, you will see all that is needful for your guidance ; duties will seem to come before you as of themselves. Dwell simply in the presence of God, and He will suffer you to doubt nothing.

Let your one effort be to profit truly by the lessons of each day. To each day belongs its evil and its good, and even the evil is turned into good if only we let God work, and do not hinder Him by our impatience.

The only thing that can bewilder you, or check the grace which God pours forth on you so abundantly, is the fearing to go too far in His service, or not suffering God to work in you *'according to His*

good pleasure,'¹ at the expense of your own wisdom. Above all things straiten Him in nothing. It is not a question of undertaking great matters, which perhaps God may never desire from you in the way that you imagine; it is only a question of following invariably, but without haste or impatience, the openings God may give you from time to time; by which He will enable you to appeal to the hearts of others, and to make known to them what they also owe to God. This is a work of patience, it demands continual faith and watchfulness, and it requires also the greatest discretion. It is most important never to be led on by inconsiderate zeal. But the necessary discretion is far from being of the kind that people imagine. It is not that worldly caution which leads one to be careful for one's own sake; it is that which ever awaits God's time, causing us to look unceasingly to Him, in order that we may move exactly as He indicates, and use the openings which He provides, guided by the light which He communicates to us; so that nothing may inter-

¹ Phil. ii. 13.

fere with any work which He would perform by our means.

I pray God that He may pour forth on you abundantly the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, with peace and faith, in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

XXIII.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

WHEN I say that those who have, in will, fully renounced self, are in very truth freed from self, I mean especially to prevent or to cure those scruples which are often caused by the selfish thoughts which still return from time to time. Those who are sincerely faithful are frequently distressed by certain ideas of their own interest which have occurred to them whilst speaking or acting. They fear that they have not resisted a kind of self-complacency, some thoughts concerning their own honour, or some merely selfish pleasure even in doing good. Such things give pain to a tender conscience ; and it is well to be reassured by the remembrance that good and evil are essentially of the will. When these recurrences to self are involuntary, they do not prevent self-renunciation from being real.

It is very rarely the case that any one who has once truly renounced self should again voluntarily give way to self-interest.

There are, however, persons of sincere piety who have not yet thus mortified their earthly affections, and who therefore still seek their own advantage in many matters. They do not exactly intend doing so, but they suffer themselves to be drawn along as if by accident. A proof that they still hold by self in all these things is that, when any such natural props are removed from them, they are utterly miserable.

Moreover, we may often cling to self in some degree without perceiving that we do so, until some trial discovers to us the true depths of our heart. It is when God takes our treasures from us, or seems likely to do so, that we learn to give up all injurious appropriation of them by the sacrifices which we make to Him. No moderate use that we make, or think we make, of these things can half so truly prove us to have indeed surrendered all to God, as some privation quietly accepted at His hands. Only loss, such loss as

God Himself brings about, will fully teach us this lesson.

In a certain stage of piety, earnest, but as yet very imperfect, there is much self-seeking. There is even a time when this is the case without our being at all able to perceive that it is so ; for God does not permit our inward light to grow beyond our capacity of obeying. Our Lord says to our hearts, as He once said to His Apostles ; '*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*'¹ We perceive within us good desires which are perfectly true ; but we should indeed be alarmed if we knew by how many things we were still holding wrongly. It is not that we deliberately say to ourselves, I possess these things, and I desire to keep them ; nevertheless we hold by them, and often fear to examine too closely as to whether it is so or not.

At another time we long to discover every weakness, that we may sacrifice all to God ; but this is an indiscreet rashness, like that of St. Peter, who said, '*I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison*

¹ St. John xvi. 12.

and unto death;' and yet he drew back in fear at the words of a maidservant. We wish to know all our weaknesses, but God spares us in the search. He refuses to give us a degree of light that would be too advanced for our present condition. He does not permit us to see that in our hearts which it is not yet time to destroy. With wonderful loving-kindness does God thus deal with us, in that He never inwardly demands from us the sacrifice of anything that we have loved until He enlightens us for the purpose ; nor does He ever so enlighten us until He has also given us the needful strength. Up to that time our eyes are closed with regard to that matter. Even the most earnest and watchful souls may be as yet in this state of darkness respecting certain sacrifices which God reserves for a more advanced stage of faith. We need never anticipate them, it is sufficient that we obey faithfully in all that we do know. If there be anything further in store for us, God will reveal it in His own time.

It is in tenderest mercy that God draws a veil over many things of which we could not yet bear

the sight. We are apt to be led away by an impatient zeal for our own perfection ; we would fain discover all, that we may at once sacrifice all ; but to wait humbly for the teaching of our God, and to bear patiently meanwhile with our own backwardness, will be far more helpful in mortifying self than all our restless efforts to advance our own perfection. Let us then be satisfied with following the light bestowed on us from one moment to another, without desiring to look further. It is our constant provision ; God gives it day by day. Like the manna of the Israelites, he who would gather up a double portion, and lay up store for the morrow misuses that which is given. It will but perish in his keeping, and he will not be able to feed more abundantly than he who has gathered only for the day.

It is this dependence, as of a child towards its father, that God would teach us, even in spiritual matters. He deals with us as a wise mother who gives to her little daughter the portion of work she would have her do ; she gives her no new work until the first is finished. So soon as you have

finished the work God has now bidden you do, He will present you with something further; for He never leaves us idle, or suffers us to stand still in the path of self-renunciation. If, on the other hand, you have not yet finished your present work, God will hide from you that which is to follow.

The traveller walking across a plain may see nothing before him but some little hill which bounds the horizon far onwards. But so soon as he has reached that height, he at once discovers an extent of country as vast as that which he has traversed. Thus, on the road of mortification and self-surrender, we imagine that we see all at a glance; we think we are withholding nothing, that we cling neither to self nor to anything else; we would rather die than hesitate in sacrificing all. But, in the detail of our lives, God reveals to us constantly some new country.

Let God work in us in His own way; and let us be faithful to our present light. That light brings with it all that is needful in order to prepare us for what will follow; and that again, by degrees, will unconsciously prepare us for yet further lessons,

of which at present we have no perception. This mortification of self will gradually penetrate to the very centre of our being, and will leave nothing there which is not of God.

Meanwhile, it is not a question of travelling quickly, but of going in the right way. If one of your servants, whom you had sent on a journey, gave all his attention to discovering the quickest means of progress, would you not say to him : ' My good friend, you would go quite fast enough to please me if only you would not stop to think so much about it, if you would but just keep to the road I have marked out for you, and arrive on the day I have appointed ' ? And that is precisely what God says to you ; that is exactly the way He would have you serve Him. Give yourself up to Him, and shut your eyes to the rest. Then will God be your Guide ; it is He who will travel with you ; He will lead you, as He led the Israelites, step by step through the desert, and onwards to the Promised Land. You have only to let God thus take full possession of you, that He may do for you '*according to the good pleasure of His goodness.*'

And, as to happiness, be persuaded by the words of others, until experience shall have made you taste the truth for yourself, that this renunciation of self and of all we value, so far from drying up and hardening the heart, produces, on the contrary, in God, not only the purest affection for our friends, but all the deepest love and truest consolation which your heart can desire.

XXIV.

ON BEING CONFORMED TO THE WILL OF GOD.

‘*The kingdom of God is within you,*’ thus hath Our Lord spoken. It is not therefore a question of having great knowledge, or talents, or even of doing great actions ; it is necessary only that the heart should desire rightly, ‘*for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.*’¹ Good works are the necessary result of true piety, and the means whereby it may be recognised ; but piety itself, which is the source of these works, exists only in the heart. Certain virtues may be suitable to one stage of our progress and not to another, but earnestness of the will is necessary at all times and in all places. To desire all that God pleases, always, and without reserve—this is the reign of God within our hearts. Thus will *His kingdom come*, since

¹ Romans x. 10.

thus *His will is done on earth as it is in heaven*. Happy are the pure in spirit—happy they who forsake all, belonging no more to themselves.

In being truly conformed to the will of God, we unite our weak will to His all-powerful might. Then, since nothing can happen to us save that which He pleases, we are perfectly satisfied ; and we find in the accomplishment of His good purposes an inexhaustible source of peace and consolation ; so that the whole life becomes a foretaste of the blessedness of heaven.

We adore, we praise, we bless God in all ; we see His hand in everything, and it is that on which our attention is fixed. There exists no more evil for us, since all things, even the most painful afflictions, ‘*work together for good to them that love God.*’¹ Shall we call that evil which God sends in order to purify our souls and make us fit for Himself?

Alas ! how many there are who, still clinging to self, would love and serve God, but in their own way, and according to their own natural tastes and

¹ ROMANS viii. 28.

inclinations—who would lay down the law as to how God shall satisfy them, and draw them after Him. They would serve Him in order to receive blessings from Him ; but they will not give themselves up to Him and become His possession. How much resistance does God find in such hearts, though they appear so zealous and so full of fervour ! In a certain sense their very spiritual gifts become their stumbling-blocks, because they hold them for their own sakes, and with constant reference to self.

How far higher in God's sight is the heart that is truly poor, that fully renounces her own will, desiring only that which God points out, through the teaching of His Gospel and of His guiding Providence, than these fervent and highly enlightened souls who will always pursue holiness by their own road !

Herein lies the deep meaning of the words of Jesus Christ, taken in their fullest significance : *'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and follow me.'* We must follow in His footsteps, not seek to open for ourselves a path by

which we may meet Him. We can only follow Christ by denying self. What is self-denial, if it be not the giving up of all right over self? Thus does St. Paul say, '*Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*'¹ No, there is nothing in us which is our own. Woe be to him who would again take possession of himself, after having given himself to God! '*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven.*'²

Let God do with us all that He pleases; let there never be, consciously, a moment's resistance. So soon as we perceive the slightest unwillingness arising in our hearts, let us at once turn trustfully to Him,—let us be on His side against our cowardly and rebellious nature. Let us give up that nature to God, so that, little by little, He may cause it to die. Let us watch in His presence against our slightest sins, lest we grieve His Holy Spirit. And let us profit by those faults which we commit, by a humble acknowledgment of our utter

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

² St. Luke ix. 62.

weakness, but without giving way to weariness or discouragement.

How can we more truly glorify God than by giving up to Him, unreservedly, ourselves and our own wills, that so He may work in us according to His good pleasure? Then is He indeed our own God, then does His kingdom come within us, when, independently of all external helps and of all internal consolation, we look only to the hand of the Lord, which doeth marvellously, and adore Him without ceasing.

To set our hearts on serving Him in one place rather than in another, or by taking one path rather than the opposite one, is wishing to serve Him in our own way, not in His. But to be equally ready for all, to desire everything that He pleases, and nothing for ourselves, to cast oneself unreservedly on His providence with unlimited submission: this is to treat Him truly as our God, and to treat ourselves as the creatures of His hand, made for Himself alone.

The cross which is borne in pure suffering, in poverty of spirit, in simplicity, and in the surrender

of our own will, unites us to the crucified Saviour. Such trials work incalculable blessings. But the cross which we push away from us through our love of self, and by wrapping ourselves up in our own desires, drives us apart from Jesus Christ, withers our hearts, and gradually quenches His Holy Spirit. Let us then yield ourselves to God in all simplicity, and, without reckoning on our own strength, which is but a broken reed, let us assure ourselves that *nothing is impossible to Him who is all-perfect and all-powerful*. 'When I am weak,' says the Apostle, 'then am I strong.'¹ *Christ's strength is sufficient for us; for His strength is made perfect in weakness*. We are strong in God in proportion to our knowledge of our own weakness.

Open then your heart, but open it without reserve, that so the love of God may pour into it without measure. Fear no evil on the road which lies before you. God will lead you by the hand, if only you doubt nothing, if only you are more filled with His love than with fears concerning yourself. Your weakness will be your strength, provided

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 10.

you cling to him as a little child; and He who is almighty will give to you according to the measure of your faith, so that you shall '*remove mountains.*' If you believe little, you will receive little, but the fault will be your own. '*As, therefore, ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, abounding therein with thanksgiving.*'¹

Live in Jesus, and live for Him; '*for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*'²

¹ Col. ii. 6, 7.

² Col. iii. 3.

XXV.

*ON SUBMISSION TO WHATEVER IT MAY PLEASE
GOD TO BRING ABOUT, EITHER WITHIN US
OR AROUND US.*

THE highest path we can follow is that of receiving equally, and with the same unvarying submission, each different circumstance that it may please God to bring about during the day, whether it be in external matters or in our own hearts.

Externally, many a disagreeable matter must be courageously met, and many a pleasant thing must be so passed by as not to suffer it to delay us on our road. We resist the temptations that arise from our trials by accepting them, and we resist the temptations of such things as flatter our hearts by refusing to give place to them. With regard to the inward changes which we experience, we can but follow the same course. Those that are full of bitterness will help to crucify the old

nature ; they will work their benefit in our souls if only we accept them submissively. And the consolations which God bestows, for the support of our weakness, we must receive from Him, not clinging to them for their own sakes, or considering them to be our own, but using them as the gifts of God ; that so, when it pleases Him to withdraw them, we may not be disheartened by their loss. All presumption arises from appropriating such blessings too closely. We fancy that it is only the gift of God that we value, but in reality we are valuing ourselves. The consequence of this error is that every time we find ourselves to have failed perceptibly, we are much disheartened. But he who leans on God alone is never surprised at his own incapacity. He even delights in feeling unable to do anything, since it is God who will do all. What matters it to me if I am poor, when I know that my Father is possessed of infinite wealth, and that he is willing to bestow it upon me abundantly ? It is by feeding the heart on God, in pure faith, that it learns to dispense with all self-confidence.

Therefore should we never reckon on our own fervour, or on the efforts we may make towards advancing our own perfection, but seek rather for simplicity, for the complete renunciation of our own inclinations, and an entire yielding to every impression of God's grace.

Let us entreat God that He will uproot from our hearts all that we have sought to plant there ourselves; and that He will plant therein, with His own hands, the tree of Life, bearing fruit unto Him.

XXVI.

ON THE RIGHT USE OF TRIALS.

THOSE operations of grace which detach us from self, and from our self-love, cannot (except by a miracle) be otherwise than painful. God, in the laws of His grace as in those of nature, works no unnecessary miracles. And the miracle would be just as great and as astonishing if a person, full of self, were suddenly to become dead to all self-interest, as it would be if an infant should, in one single day, grow to the full height of a man. God conceals the operations of His grace, as He conceals those of nature, by means of a gradual series of events. He carries on the work step by step, using those instruments which appear the most simple and the best adapted for attaining His ends; so that human wisdom often attributes the results to that which is merely natural, the hand of

God being scarcely recognised. Else would God's work be a continual miracle, and the state of faith in which it pleases Him that we should live would be wholly reversed.

God therefore operates in our hearts gradually, and often obscurely. He makes use of the inconstancy and ingratitude of other men, of the disappointments we meet with even in prosperity, and thus gradually detaches us from created love and deceitful pleasures. He weans us from ourselves by the experience of our own weakness and sinfulness through our innumerable failures. All this appears perfectly natural, but it is just this course of events which seems so natural that slowly and painfully consumes the old nature in us. We would willingly enough be consumed all at once by the flames of love, but that would cost us no suffering; it is the very excess of our self-love which makes us wish to gain our perfection so easily.

God gives us no suffering but, as it were, in spite of Himself. His Fatherly love seeks not our pain; but he wounds us to the quick in order that He

may cure the evil of our nature. It is needful that He should take from us that which we love wrongly, or which we so love as to interfere with our love for Him. He makes us weep like children from whom the knife with which they are playing is taken away, lest they should kill themselves with it. We weep, we are miserable, we cry aloud in our distress, we are ready to murmur against Him, as children in their passion cry out against their own mother. But God lets us weep, and saves us. He afflicts us only for our correction. Even when He appears to overwhelm us, it is but for our welfare, it is only in order to spare us the evils we should have inflicted on ourselves. That for which we are now weeping, might have made us weep eternally ; that which we now think lost was truly lost to us had it remained in our possession. God has put it away in safety, that so He may restore it to us in that eternal life to which we are drawing near. He deprives us of that which we love in order to enable us to love it with a purer affection, and to ensure to us the eternal enjoyment of our treasure in His own bosom, making

us there a hundredfold happier than we could ever, of ourselves, have even desired.

Happy is he who suffers ! happy is he, if he suffer in a peaceful, humble spirit ! That which is of God's own work is never carried too far. If we had control over our own suffering, we should never suffer enough to make self die in us. God, who knows us far better than we know ourselves, who loves us infinitely more than we love ourselves, knows the right proportion of trial that is needed ; and He will never allow us '*to be tempted above that we are able.*' Love can sweeten all ; we only suffer so much because we love so little, God will have us entirely His own, and it is on the cross that He can take full possession.

O my God ! Thou who seest the depth of our evil, which Thou alone canst cure, grant us faith, hope, love ; give us the Christian courage which we so much lack. Teach us to look ever unto Thee. Lord ! Thou knowest our weakness and helplessness ; Thou seest that we have no health in us—that all fails. Yet is our need but gain, if only Thou forsake us not—if only we seek in Thee, through faith, all that is lacking in ourselves.

XXVII.

ON SUFFERING.

ONLY pure love is truly willing to suffer, for only pure love surrenders itself fully to God. Resignation may accept suffering, nevertheless resignation is to a certain extent unwilling to suffer, and does but just withhold itself from rebellion. But the love which has learned to surrender all to God, feeds in silence on the cross of Christ, and on union with the crucified Saviour, without reflecting selfishly on her own suffering. Only the will which is thus satisfied with the will of God can yield to Him in suffering, without self-contemplation. At such a time we may be able to say nothing, to remark nothing, to do nothing, only to suffer; and that suffices; it is all we then have to do. Love can make itself understood without speaking, and even without thinking. There is one only thing

that is required of us, and that is to wish for nothing when we have nothing. A will satisfied with God's will when all else is taken away is the purest of all love.

How soothing is the thought that there is no need of constant efforts to urge ourselves to be patient, no need of any strained watchfulness in order to support the character of a virtue which must be constantly acted upon externally. It suffices to be as little children in God's hands, and to surrender ourselves to Him. It is not courage that we need ; it is something at once less than courage, and at the same time far higher : less in the eyes of even virtuous men, far higher in the eyes of those who judge by pure faith. It is that weakness of self which casts all on the mighty strength of God. *'When I am weak, then am I strong; I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.'*¹

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 10. Phil. iv. 13.

XXVIII.

*PEACE CONSISTS ONLY IN THE FULL SURRENDER
OF THE HEART TO GOD'S WILL.*

OH how greatly does the peace of God differ from that which the world gives! It calms the heart, purifies the conscience, and, by union with God, strengthens against temptation. Temptations, if they do not overcome us, only bring forth the fruit of peace; for true peace consists in union with the will of God.

*'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful.'*¹ A true simplicity of heart, the inward calm which arises from surrendering yourself wholly to the will of God, that patience with the faults of others which is inspired by the thought of God's presence, a childlike readiness to acknowledge your own

¹ St. Luke x. 41, 42.

faults and to accept blame,—such are the virtues which you need in your Christian course.

The distress which you feel about many things arises from your not accepting with sufficient willingness whatever God sends you. Put all these matters into His hands ; sacrifice all beforehand with your whole heart. So soon as you no longer desire anything according to your own judgment, and wish only for that which God may please, you will be no longer troubled with these restless anxieties ; you will have nothing to conceal, nothing to make you hesitate. Up to that point you will be anxious, changeable in your opinions and tastes, easily annoyed by others, dissatisfied with yourself, full of distrust. Your kindness of heart, until it is made humble and meek, will only torment you ; your piety, however sincere, will give you more reproaches of conscience than quietness of heart. But when you have abandoned yourself entirely to God, you will be at peace, and full of the joy of the Holy Spirit.

The love of God gives peace without presumption ; self-love gives sorrow without profit. Do

each duty as perfectly as you can for Love's sake. See where you have failed, without flattering yourself or feeling discouraged ; then, giving yourself up into God's hands, work in faith, and try quietly to do better.

The more empty you find yourself of all good, and of all human resources, the more you will find that an inward light and strength will support you in your need,—even whilst suffering you to feel your weakness, as though you were ready to fall at every step. But do not consider that this help is your due ; you would deserve to lose it if you fancied that you deserved to receive it. Feel yourself to be unworthy of all, and cast yourself on God in deep humility.

God will give you all the time that is needful for coming to Him. He will not perhaps give you all that you would wish for, in order to occupy yourself according to your own tastes, or to live to yourself under the pretext of perfection, but you will not want either for time or for opportunities in which to deny yourself and your own desires. You will even find that all will be arranged according

to your true wants, for, so much as it may please God to mortify your inclinations, so much will He also support your weakness. Fear nothing ; let Him work for you. You will always be free in God, provided you are never afraid of losing your freedom.

When the love of God truly fills the heart, it is full of peace—it is satisfied. That heart needs no earthly pleasures ; she cares only for the will of God, and watches with unceasing desire for the coming of the Heavenly Bridegroom.

XXIX.

CONCERNING SIMPLICITY.

TRUE simplicity is that straightforwardness of soul which refuses all self-contemplation. It is quite different from sincerity, and is a quality of higher value ; for many people are sincere who are far from having attained simplicity. They are constantly studying themselves, reconsidering the words they have spoken, or examining their own thoughts, fearing lest they have said too much, or done too much. God does not desire that our souls should be occupied with themselves—that we should be constantly considering ourselves as in a looking-glass, in order to arrange ourselves more to our taste.

Simplicity consists in the right medium, which is neither too eager nor too indifferent. The soul is by no means hindered thereby from necessary reflection ; but neither does simplicity suffer any

indulgence in those thoughts of self which a restless desire for our own excellence multiplies unceasingly. It is that liberty of soul which causes us to look straight before us on the path we are treading, but without pausing to argue about our steps, or to study those we have already taken. Such is true simplicity.

The more docile and obedient our souls become, and the more we suffer ourselves to be led onwards without resistance or hesitation, the more advance we make in simplicity. It is not that we become blind to our own faults, or cease to feel our infirmities ; we feel them more than ever ; we dread the slightest sin ; our inward light so increases as to reveal more and more of our corruption ; and this arises not from self-contemplation, but from the light of God's presence, which shows us how far we are from His perfect purity.

This simplicity is, however, by no means to be reached by those souls who have not been purified by deep repentance ; *for it is godly sorrow that worketh repentance to salvation.*¹ It can only be

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

the fruit of entire self-renunciation—of that love for God which is free from self-interest ; it is therefore to be attained little by little.

Let us seek for it earnestly. How far have we yet to travel before we reach its full perfection ? The farther we are from it, the more need to hasten onwards. So far from being simple, the greater number of Christians are not even sincere. They deceive their neighbours ; they deceive themselves ; they would even deceive God ; they have recourse to a thousand little expedients for distorting the truth. They secretly nourish pride, and pride necessarily interferes with that simplicity which consists in the sincere renunciation and constant forgetfulness of self.

But you will say, How am I to avoid being occupied with self ? It is the constant recurrence to self that troubles me ; it tyrannises over me ; it causes me the keenest distress.

I only desire that you should overcome all that is voluntary in this matter. Never allow yourself, consciously, to dwell on these restless thoughts of self ; that will be sufficient ; provided that you are

faithful in at once dropping all such self-contemplation whenever you perceive it, you will, little by little, be delivered from it.

The principal thing is to have sincerely given up into God's hands all our own interests, whether they concern our pleasure, our wealth, or our honour. He who boldly ventures all, unreservedly accepting whatever God may please of humiliation or of suffering, of trials from within or from without, has begun dying to himself. This condition of full acceptance and continual acquiescence will bring true liberty, and liberty produces perfect simplicity.

The soul which has no more self-interest, reckoning no longer on self, is full of candour. The road that opens before such souls is ever widening ; and, in proportion to their renunciation and forgetfulness of self, their peace becomes deep as the ocean—even in the midst of their trials are they at peace. But so long as we cling to self, we are embarrassed, uncertain, wrapped up in selfishness. Happy is he who is no longer his own, who is '*constrained by the love of Christ ; because we thus judge, that, if*

*one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.'*¹

But, it may be asked, are we never to think at all of ourselves, or of anything that interests us? By no means, such constraint would be undesirable: instead of becoming simple, we should wander far from simplicity by the scrupulous determination never to speak of ourselves, lest we should be occupied with self.

What then are we to do? Let us make no rule about it, and be content with affecting nothing. When we are tempted to speak of self for our own sakes, we have only to despise our own vanity and simply occupy our thoughts again with God, or with that which He has given us to do. Simplicity forbids false shame or affected modesty as much as it forbids ostentation or self-complacency. When some thought of vanity prompts us to speak, we have only to drop that thought at once. On the other hand, if our thoughts prompt us to speak of

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

ourselves for some good reason, we should not wait to argue about it, but go straight forward to the end we have in view. We may not pause to ask, What will people think of me? will they think I am boasting foolishly—will they suspect me of speaking thus in my own interest? Such considerations do not deserve a moment's attention. Let us speak of ourselves openly and quietly, just as we would of any other person, when need arises for doing so. Thus does St. Paul frequently speak of himself in his Epistles. With regard to his birth, he makes known his Roman citizenship, and compels his judge to acknowledge his rights. He says that in nothing was he behind the very chiefest Apostles; that he had gained nothing from them in doctrine, nor received anything for the ministry; that he was as acceptable to the Lord as they were. He declares that he has laboured and suffered more than all of them; that he withstood Peter to the face, because he was to be blamed. He speaks of having been caught up to the third heaven; that he knows nothing against himself; he asserts that he is a chosen vessel to

preach to the Gentiles. He even says to the faithful, '*Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ.*'¹ What true greatness to speak thus simply of oneself! St. Paul quietly says of himself the highest possible things, yet he appears neither moved by them nor occupied with the least self-consciousness; he merely relates these facts as one might relate something which occurred two thousand years ago. We cannot all venture to speak thus; all cannot attain to such sublime simplicity; and we must not attempt acting upon it before we are able. But, when we have any real need to speak of ourselves, let us do so simply, neither giving way to affected modesty nor to the shame which arises from false pride. Vain glory often hides itself under an appearance of modesty and reserve. We will not, perhaps, show what there is good in us; but we are very glad to let others discover it, that so we may have at the same time both the honour we think due to our virtue and the honour of concealing it.

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 1.

In cases which arise suddenly, and which give us no time for consideration, we must yield ourselves to God, following the light that He bestows upon us, and doing that which appears best at the moment, without hesitation, for hesitating does but confuse our perceptions. Let us act at once in the best way we are able. If we make any mistake, good will be brought out of the evil, and God will not impute to us the error into which we may thus fall, if only we trust ourselves to Him in simplicity of heart.

As to the question of speaking against oneself, I would neither blame it nor especially recommend it. When it is done in true simplicity, by reason of the contempt which, by God's teaching, we have learnt really to feel for ourselves, such words may be wonderfully blessed; and so do I regard the manner in which many holy people have thus spoken. But, in general, the safest way is not to speak of oneself at all unnecessarily, either for good or for evil. Self-love fears silence and contempt far more than it fears injuries. And often we feel ready enough to speak evil of ourselves,

and yet are quite disposed to forgive and love ourselves as before.

With respect to our faults, we must be watchful to correct them, according to the state of progress we have attained ; for there are as many different ways of watching against our faults as there are different stages in our spiritual life. Each work must be proportioned to the capacity of our inward condition. As a general rule, however, it is quite certain that we do far more towards curing all that is amiss in us by simple devotion to God,—by the extinction of our own selfish desires,—in fact, by dwelling in the love of God and yielding our hearts fully to Him,—than by any anxious reflections about ourselves. When God undertakes the matter, and when we do not put hindrances in His way, He carries on the work rapidly. It is He who *‘will fulfil in you all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.’*¹

¹ 2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

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